

Facts & Trends

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Mental Health and the Church

*Tearing down
the walls of silence*



RETHINKING
MENTAL ILLNESS

A PASTOR'S
JOURNEY THROUGH
DEPRESSION

THE CHURCH'S ROLE
IN RECOVERY

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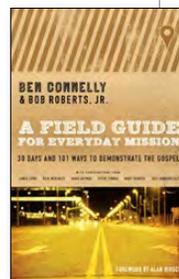
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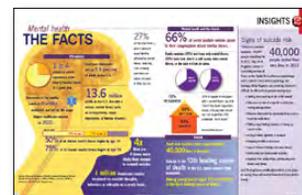
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INSIDE F&T

Trading silence for hope

When we hear the words *mental illness*, far too often, the images that fill our minds are caricatures created by popular media. What's reported in the news or portrayed in television and film doesn't tell the whole story. Mental illness is something that affects a significant portion of Americans—1 in 4 adults suffer some form of mental health disorder every year. But many suffer in silence because the enduring stigma of mental illness teaches people to hide the truth about what they're going through.

We probably all know someone who has battled mental illness. And Christians are certainly not immune. But the church's silence tells people with mental illness they are not welcome to share their struggles.

The evangelical faith community doesn't have a great record when it comes to helping these silent sufferers. People are often blamed for bringing the suffering on themselves. Others are ignored or shuffled out the door. The church could make a difference if it only had a better understanding of mental illness.

In this issue, Bob Smietana unpacks the findings of LifeWay Research's study on mental health and the church. Amy Simpson candidly discusses growing up watching her mother battle schizophrenia and the toll it took on her family. She offers a better way for churches to respond to families who live with mental illness. Pastor Art Greco shares his own journey through depression. And Thom Rainer offers an encouraging word to pastors who struggle with depression. We also included an interview with scholar Matthew Stanford, who trains churches how to minister to those living with a mental illness. Finally, Ed Stetzer talks frankly about the stigma of mental illness and challenges the church to shape a new, more helpful approach to serving the hurting people around us.

In dark and difficult times, hope is essential. Isn't that what we as a faith community should offer? The only way to dispel the stereotypes and shatter the stigma is to openly and compassionately address the topic. We pray this issue inspires and challenges you to break the silence in your church.

Carol Pipes, Editor

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FROM MY PERSPECTIVE

Pastors experience depression, too

Depression was once a topic reserved for “other people.” Christians, especially pastors, aren’t supposed to feel depressed. Aren’t these servants of God supposed to have their acts together? How could pastors and other ministers experience the dark valley of depression? The truth is, pastors are as likely as other Americans to experience mental illness.

A recent study by LifeWay Research found nearly 1 in 4 pastors (23 percent) acknowledge they have personally struggled with a mental illness such as depression, and half of those pastors said the illness had been diagnosed. Sadly, many of them are reticent to say anything about their depression or other mental illness lest they be viewed as unfaithful to God and unable to help others.

So, what are the causes of the depression? A number of factors can increase the chance of depression, and my list of possible triggers is certainly not exhaustive. While not all of these pressure points are unique to pastors, they are pervasive among them.

- **Spiritual warfare.** The Enemy doesn’t want pastors to be effective in ministry. He will do whatever it takes to hurt ministers and their ministries.
- **Unrealistic expectations.** The expectations and demands upon a pastor are enormous and often unrealistic.

Congregants are sometimes quick to express their frustrations toward the pastor when expectations aren’t met, making the pastor feel like a failure.

- **Greater platforms for critics.** In “the good old days,” a critic’s complaints were typically limited to telephone, mail, and in-person meetings. Today, critics have the visible and pervasive platforms of email, blogs, and social media such as Facebook and Twitter.
- **Failure to take time away from the church or place of ministry.** Workaholicism leads to burnout, and burnout leads to depression.
- **Marriage and family problems.** Too often pastors neglect their families as they try to care for the larger church family.
- **Financial strains.** Many pastors don’t have sufficient income from the churches they serve. That financial stress can lead to depression. Some pastors don’t know how to manage the money they do have, leading to further financial strain.
- **The comparison game.** Every pastor knows of a church that is larger and more effective. Every pastor knows of another pastor who seems more successful. The comparison game can be debilitating to some pastors.

Though triggers can often be determined, this is not always the case. For some the causes of depression are never known.

The demands of ministry can create a pressure-cooker situation for pastors. While it’s important to care for one’s physical health, it’s also necessary to guard your mental health. If you are struggling with depression or some other mental illness, allow me to offer a few thoughts and words of encouragement.

- **You are not alone.** To the contrary, the problem is widespread. There are many in this company of fellow strugglers.
- **You need not be ashamed.** Mental illness is just that—it is an illness. If we have cancer, we freely acknowledge our physical illness. Pastors shouldn’t be ashamed to say they have a mental illness.
- **Seek help.** Find trusted professionals who can help you. A medical doctor can help determine if there are physiological reasons for your struggle. And a good counselor can help you sort through the issues and find hope.
- **Make the recommended changes.** Once struggling pastors seek help from professionals, they will be advised about next steps. Listen to them. Heed their advice. Make the necessary changes.
- **Remain faithful.** Mental illness is not an automatic end to your ministry. Many pastors continue to serve and thrive in ministry even though they struggle. Remember, weaknesses can be occasions for God to work in a person. ■

Thom S. Rainer (@ThomRainer) is president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources.



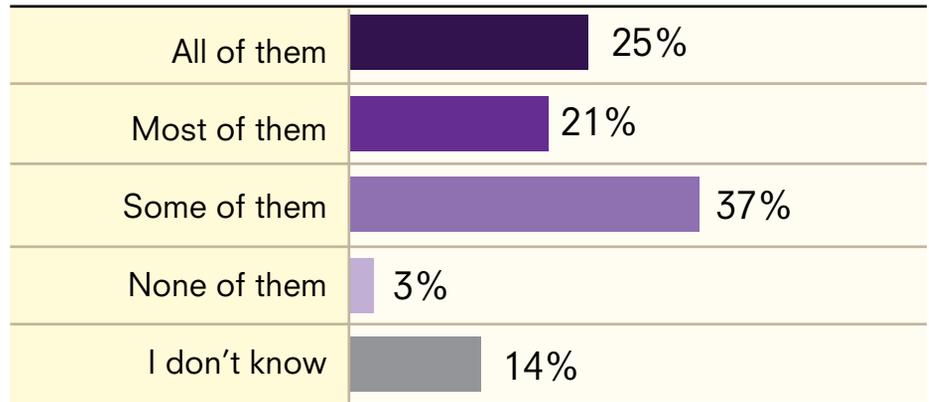
Mission trip growth:

The number of U.S. Christians taking part in trips of a year or less leaped from **540 in 1965** to an estimated more than **1.5 million annually in 2008**, with an estimated \$2 billion spent yearly, according to Dr. Robert Priest, a missiology professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Source: *Missiology Journal*

Among Americans who pray:

Percent of my prayers answered



Most Americans who pray (83 percent) think at least some of their prayers are answered. When they pray, most Americans (82 percent) typically focus on their friends and family or their own problems (74 percent). Just over half (54 percent) pray about good things happening in their life, while over a third pray for their future prosperity (36 percent).

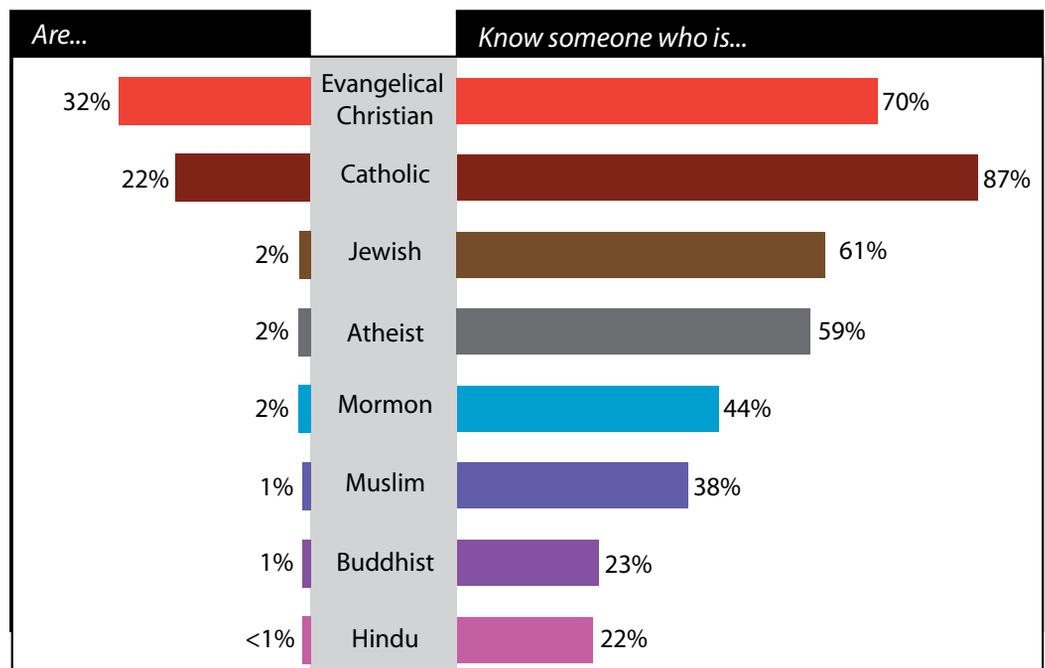
Source: *LifeWay Research*

How many people of different faiths do you know?

The average American personally knows members of at least four of eight religious groups included in a survey by the Pew Research Center. A majority of Americans (87 percent) say they know someone who is Catholic. The second-most familiar group is Evangelicals with 70 percent of Americans saying they know someone who is an evangelical Christian.

Source: *Pew Research*

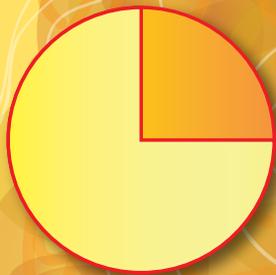
Percent of Americans who are members of a religious group, compared with the percentage who know a member of that group.



Mental health

THE FACTS

Prevalence



1 in 4
American adults
experience some
kind of mental illness
in a given year.

Each year depression
affects **5-8 percent**
of adults in the U.S.

Depression is the leading
cause of **disability**
worldwide and will be the single
largest healthcare expense
by **2020**.



13.6 million
adults in the U.S. live with a
serious mental illness such
as schizophrenia, major
depression, or bipolar disorder.

Age of onset

50% by age 14

75% by age 24

50% of all chronic mental illness begins by age 14

75% of all chronic mental illness begins by age 24

4x

Men are
4 times more
likely than women
to commit suicide.

1 million

The number of Americans who receive
treatment for suicidal thoughts, behaviors or
attempts on a yearly basis.

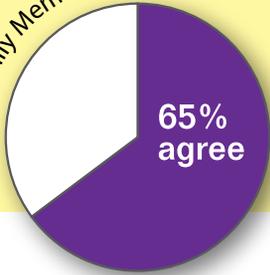
27%
of churches have a
plan in place to
assist families
affected by mental
illness. And only
21% of family
members are
aware of a plan
in their church.

Sources: National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, National Alliance on Mental Illness, American Medical Association, World Health Organization

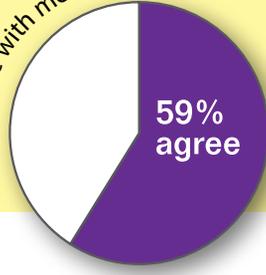


Mental health and the church

Family Members



People with mental illness



People want to talk about mental illness

Family members (65%) and those with mental illness (59%) agree their church should talk openly about mental illness, so the topic will not be taboo.

66% of senior pastors seldom speak to their congregation about mental illness.

13%
not supportive



33%
don't know

53%
supportive

53% of regular churchgoers with a mental illness say their church has been supportive. About 13% say their church was not supportive; 33% answered, "don't know."

Source: LifeWay Research

Suicide

Each year suicide claims approximately **40,000** lives in America.

Suicide is the **10th leading cause of death** in the U.S. (more common than homicide).

Among young people aged 15 to 24 suicide is the third leading cause of death.

Signs of suicide risk

"Suicide is a national epidemic—40,000 people ended their life in 2013," says Jared Pingleton, director of counseling services at Focus on the Family. He is a licensed psychologist and is trained in both clinical psychology and theology. While Pingleton says predicting behavior is difficult, he offered these general warning signs.

- Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself.
- Discussion or talk of a specific suicidal plan; making arrangements.
- Behavior that would be potentially lethal such as hoarding medication.
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.
- Acting irritable, agitated, or enraged.
- Sleeping too little or too much.
- Loss of interest in things one cares about.
- Withdrawal from pleasurable activities.
- Isolation from relationships, withdrawing from friends and family.

Visit Focus on the Family's ThrivingPastor.com/MentalHealth for a free guide to serving those with mental illness.

Suicides rise in middle-aged men, and older men remain at risk

Men have historically been more likely to commit suicide than women, but a new, vulnerable group is emerging from their ranks: middle-aged men. The rate for middle-aged men now eclipses older men, who historically have had the highest rate of suicide.

In 2011, 39,518 people committed suicide—a rate of 12.7 per 100,000 and the highest in the last 12 years, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The middle-aged—people 45 to 64 years—had the highest rate, the result of an upward trend since 1999. In particular, death rates for middle-aged men have increased since 2000 from 21.3 to 29.2 in 2010, more than women in the same age group. The rising rate of suicide in middle-aged men, and the fact that older men continue to have a high rate of suicide, points to the need for more suicide prevention efforts aimed at men, the CDC says.

Source: NPR.org



MAJORITY STILL SAYS RELIGION CAN ANSWER TODAY'S PROBLEMS

While an increasing number of Americans say religion is out of date, most Americans still believe there's a place for religion in our society. Fifty-seven percent of Americans say religion can answer all or most of today's problems, while 30 percent say religion is largely old-fashioned and out-of-date. Americans have, in recent decades, become gradually less likely to say that religion can answer today's problems and more likely to believe religion is out of date.

Source: Gallup



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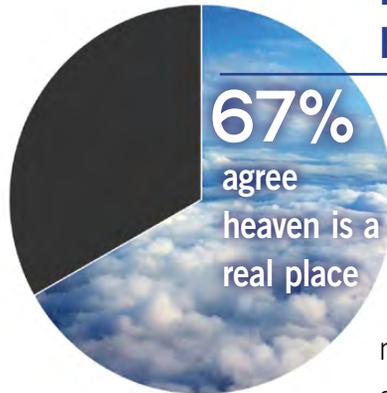
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“The good news for depressed people is that God is gentle with us in the very places where we are often hardest on ourselves. In fact, He promises not to break a reed that is badly bruised (Isaiah 42:3), but instead to gently restore it until it is strong enough to stand again. If depression is like a bruise, then God’s love is like a balm, which soothes and restores. It’s not a quick fix, but something you gently apply over the course of a lifetime.”

— Sammy Rhodes (SammyRhodes.co)



HEAVEN IS REAL, BUT YOU HAVE TO WORK TO GET THERE

That’s the consensus from Americans, according to a recent study by LifeWay Research. Sixty-seven percent of Americans say heaven is a real place, not just a concept. However, 71 percent of Americans say an individual must contribute his or her own effort for personal salvation.



AMERICANS NOT AS HOT ON HELL

Sixty-one percent of Americans agree Hell is a real place, not just a concept. Another 22 percent disagree and 18 percent are not sure.

Source: LifeWay Research

Want to remember what you read? Switch to paper.

Going digital might be good for trees, but it’s bad for memory, suggests new findings from researchers in Norway. Studies show digital readers are significantly worse at comprehending and remembering what they’ve read compared to hard copy readers.

Source: Inc.com

Excuse me, could you please pass the plate?

In a recent study of large churches (1,000 to more than 30,000 attendees), researchers found donations are slightly higher at churches that pass an offering plate. All churches in the study offered more than one option for giving: 81 percent provide online giving options; 80 percent pass a collection plate; 37 percent have a donation box in the lobby; and 25 percent have an electronic kiosk in the lobby. The study examined

727 churches in the U.S. and Canada.

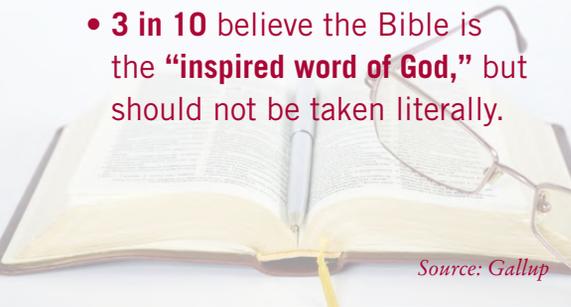
Source: Leadership Network and Vanderbloemen Search Group



INSIGHTS

HOW NON-CHRISTIANS VIEW THE BIBLE

- **1 in 10** believe the Bible is the “**actual word of God**” and should be “taken literally, word for word.”
- **3 in 10** believe the Bible is the “**inspired word of God,**” but should not be taken literally.



Source: Gallup

Morning person or night owl?

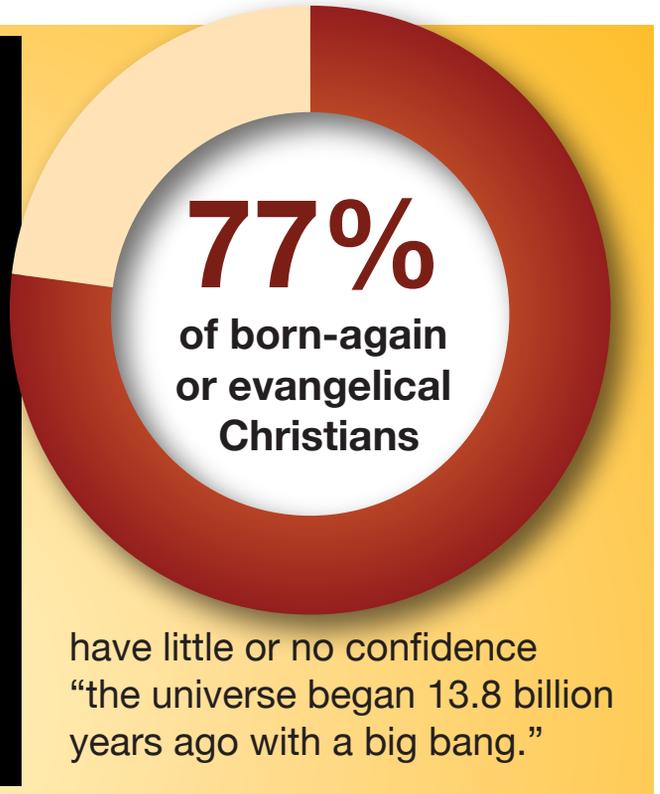
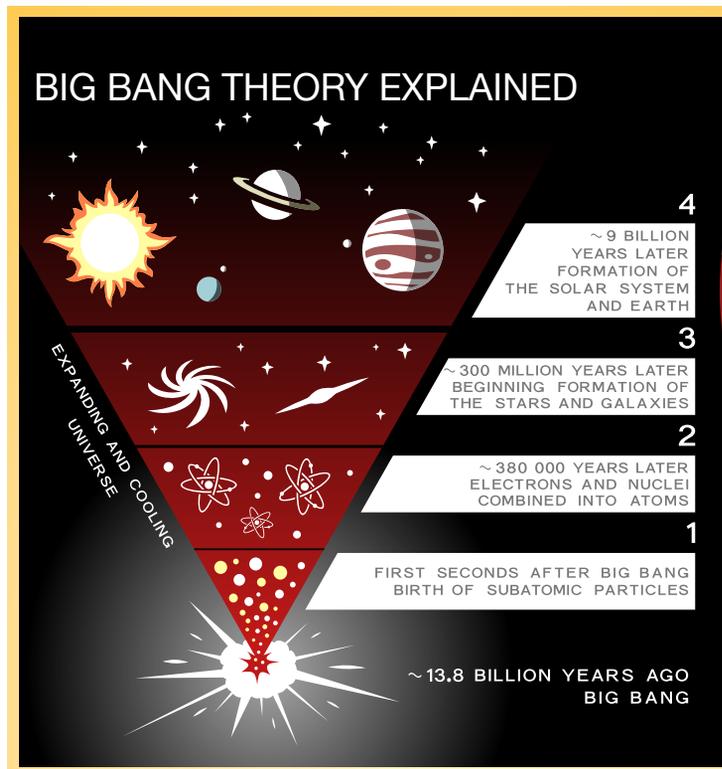
Recent research indicates that morning people tend to be less ethical at night and night owls less ethical during the day. “The important organizational takeaway from these findings is that individuals may be more likely to act unethically when they are ‘mismatched’—that is, making a decision at the wrong time of day for their own chronotype. Leaders should try to learn the chronotype (lark, owl, or in between) of their staff members and make sure to respect it when deciding how to structure their work. Leaders who ask a lark to make ethics-testing decisions at night, or an owl to make such decisions in the morning, run the risk of encouraging rather than discouraging unethical behavior.”



Source: Blogs.HBR.org

Believers skeptical about some scientific claims

Religious identity—particularly evangelical Protestant—is one of the sharpest indicators of skepticism toward key issues in science, according to a survey by The Associated Press. Fifty-one percent of U.S. adults overall (including 77 percent of people who say they are born-again or evangelical) have little or no confidence that “the universe began 13.8 billion years ago with a big bang.”



Source: ReligionNews.com

Mental Health and the Church

Tearing down the walls of silence

With the recent suicide death of Robin Williams, depression and mental health has become a greater part of the cultural conversation lately. And to some extent, it has for the church, too.

On April 5, 2013, Rick and Kay Warren's son, Matthew, took his own life. He was only 27 years old, but had struggled with depression all his life. The Warrens have been very open about their son's death and the need for the church to help people who struggle with mental illness. For the most part, churches haven't talked much about mental illness. There's often been a stigma attached to it—as if having faith in Jesus makes you immune from suffering from mental illness. The truth is, Christians get depressed, too. And thankfully, more of us are willing to talk about it and support each other.

12

Hello, my name is not schizophrenia

Dealing openly with mental illness can lead to better outcomes for sufferers and create a healthier church environment for everyone.

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Breaking the silence

Amy Simpson shares the story of her mom's mental illness and suggests ways the church can help those affected by mental illness.

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Finding my way home

Pastor Art Greco talks about how he has learned to fight depression.

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Rethinking mental illness

Lizette Beard interviews mental health expert Matthew Stanford on the role of the church in recovery.

Hello
my name is

NOT
Schizophrenia

Getting beyond the stigma of mental illness

By Bob Smetana

Even Christian counselors sometimes forget their mentally ill patients still have souls.

Just ask Michael Lyles.

Lyles, a clinical psychiatrist, has a practice in Atlanta, where most of his clients are evangelical Christians. But not all them. Some have no faith, including a man who was schizophrenic and beset with hallucinations. This patient was a bit of a hermit, spending most of his time sitting at home watching television.

But after his condition stabilized, his life started returning to normal. He made some new friends, and one of them shared the gospel with him. Coming to faith in Christ didn't take away his hallucinations or cure his schizophrenia. But it led him to a church, a new group of friends, and a better life.

One day the patient came into Lyle's office with a question: "Why didn't you ever tell me about Jesus?" He then shared with Lyle how his church and his new faith in Christ had changed his life.

"I would have never found this if no one had told me about the gospel," the patient told Lyle.

Lyle says he sat there for a minute and then admitted his guilt. "I was just happy you weren't psychotic anymore; I forgot you were a person."

That kind of response isn't uncommon, according to a new study on

mental health and faith, co-sponsored by LifeWay Research and Focus on the Family. The study found that ministering to those with mental illness remains a challenge.

That's partly because dealing with mental illness, like other chronic conditions, can feel overwhelming. Patients often feel as if their diagnosis defines their life, while counselors and even pastors can forget that people with mental illness still have a spiritual life.

As a result, churches sometimes miss

members of the mentally ill.

They surveyed 1,000 senior Protestant pastors about how their church approaches mental illness. Then they surveyed 355 Americans diagnosed with a serious mental illness—in this case moderate or severe depression, bipolar, or schizophrenia. Among them were 200 church-going Protestants.

A third survey polled 207 family members of people with mental illness. LifeWay Research also conducted in-depth interviews with Lyle and more

“Because of the way we have ignored mental illness, we are hurting people. We have created a stigma.”

— Ed Stetzer

the chance to minister to those with mental illness.

"Because of the way we have ignored mental illness, we are hurting people," says Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research. "We've created a stigma."

ADDRESSING THE STIGMA

The LifeWay Research study was designed to address that stigma and to help churches better assist those affected by mental illness.

Researchers focused on three groups: Protestant pastors, Americans diagnosed with mental illness, and family

than a dozen experts on spirituality and mental health.

The study found that pastors and churches want to help those who experience mental illness. But those good intentions don't always lead to effective ministry.

Among the study's findings:

- Most Protestant senior pastors (66 percent) seldom speak to their congregation about mental illness. That includes the almost half (49 percent) who "rarely" (39 percent) or "never" (10 percent) speak about mental illness. About 1 in 6 pastors (16 percent) speak about mental illness once a year.

- About a quarter of pastors (22 percent) admit to being reluctant to help those who suffer from acute mental illness because it takes too much time.
- Meanwhile, family members (65 percent) and those with mental illness (59 percent) want their church to talk openly about mental illness, so the topic will not be taboo.

The silence from the pulpit and churches can leave people feeling ashamed about mental illness, says Jared Pingleton, director of counseling services at Focus on the Family. Those with mental illness can feel left out, as if the church doesn't care. Or worse, they can feel as if mental illness is sign of spiritual failure.

"We can talk about diabetes and Aunt Mable's lumbago in church—those are seen as medical conditions," he says. "But mental illness—that's somehow seen as a lack of faith."

Stetzer says pastors should challenge the idea that someone is a bad Christian because they struggle with mental illness. Instead, he says, they should offer friendship and care to those with mental illness.

"We've sent the message that there's something wrong with you if you're a Christian with mental illness," he says. "The truth is there is something wrong with you—you're ill and you need help. And the church can be part of the healing process."

Step one is talking about mental illness, so people know help is available. Researchers found two-thirds of pastors (68 percent) say their church maintains a list of local mental health resources for church members. But few families (28 percent) are aware those resources exist, and so don't take advantage of them.

PASTORS AWARE OF NEED

Most pastors in the survey said they know people who have been diagnosed with mental illness. Nearly 6 in 10 (59 percent) have counseled someone who was later diagnosed.

And pastors themselves aren't immune from mental illness. About a quarter (23 percent) say they've experienced some kind of mental illness, while 12 percent say they've received a diagnosis for a mental health condition.

But those pastors are often reluctant to share their struggles, says Chuck Hannaford, a clinical psychologist and president of HeartLife Professional Soul-Care in Germantown, Tennessee.

Hannaford, another of the experts in the LifeWay Research study, counsels pastors as part of his practice. Many, he says, keep their mental illness hidden from their congregation.

"You know it's a shame we can't be more open about it," he told researchers. "What I'm talking about is an openness from the pulpit that people

struggle with these issues and there's not an easy answer."

Pingleton says pastors and church members alike can find solace in the Scriptures. He points out that many biblical characters suffered from emotional struggles. And some, were they alive today, would likely be diagnosed with mental illness.

"The Bible is filled with people who struggled with suicide, or were majorly depressed or bi-polar," he says. "They are not remembered for those things. They are remembered for their faith."

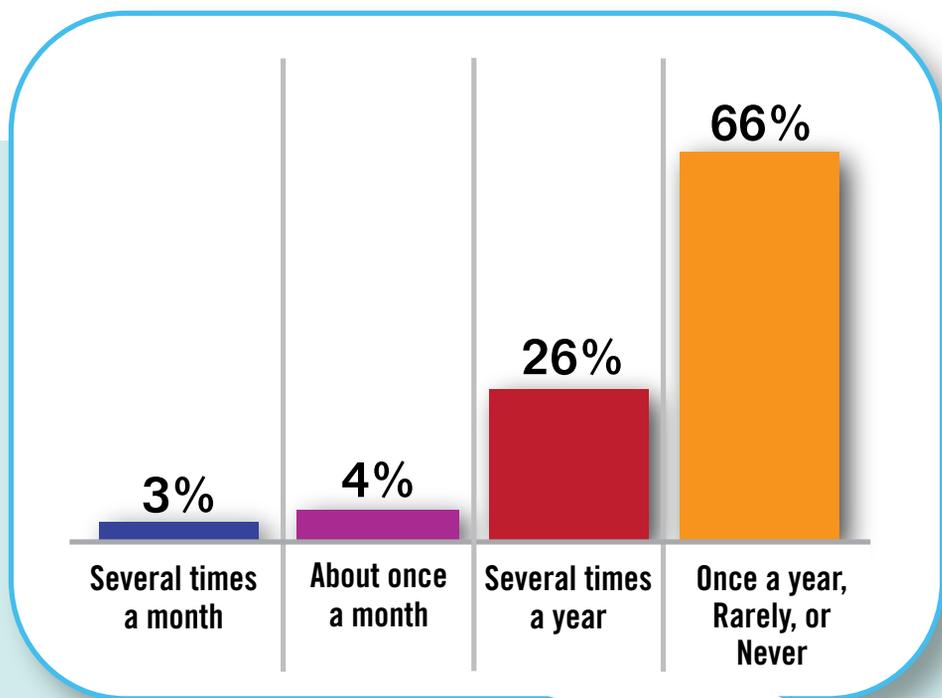
Pingleton says ministry to those with mental illness is a delicate balance. Churches have to show care and concern. But church leaders also need to know when to refer someone to a mental health professional or doctor, especially when in cases of serious mental illness.

Pastors, he says, walk a fine line when making a referral. Church members may feel rejected if their pastor passes them off to someone else. But the pastor may not have the right skills to help them.

The important thing to do is stay connected even after a referral, he says.

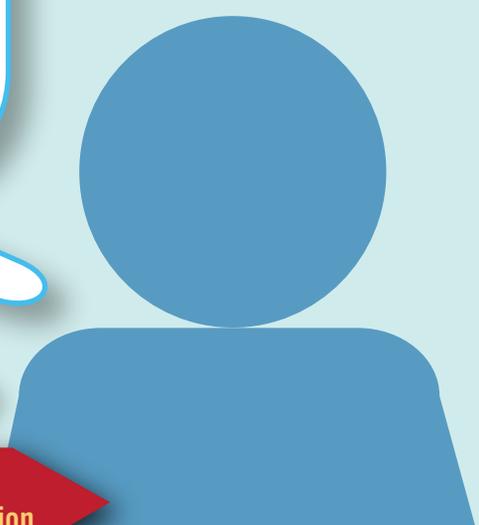
COMMUNITY MATTERS

Christians are supposed to bear one another's burdens. Those burdens can include mental illness, says Warren Kinghorn, assistant professor of



1% Don't know.

How often pastors speak to the church in sermons or large group messages about mental illness.

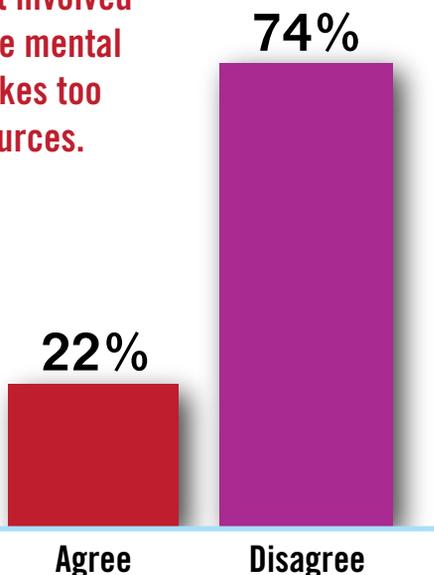


23% of pastors say they've experienced some kind of mental illness.

12% of pastors say they've received a diagnosis of a mental health condition.

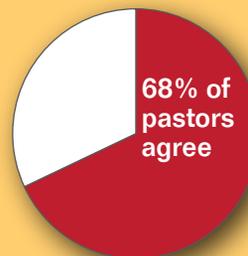
Among pastors:

I am reluctant to get involved with those with acute mental illness because it takes too much time and resources.

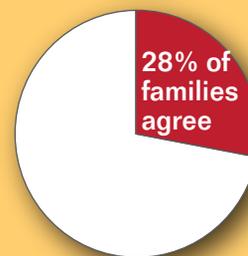


4% Don't know.

Mental health resources need to be communicated and made available.



Church maintains a list of local mental health resources for church members



Families are aware resources for mentally ill exist in their church

Source: LifeWay Research

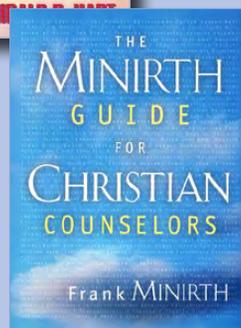
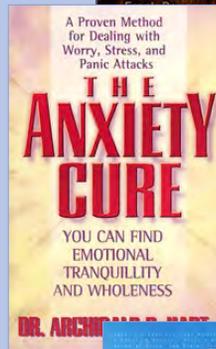
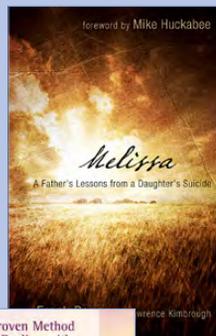
More than 3 out of 4 of those with mental illness had received therapy. 79 percent said therapy was effective.

— LifeWay Research



DIG DEEPER

- ThrivingPastor.com/MentalHealth
- Ministry in the Face of Mental Illness Bible Study FactsAndTrends.net/MentalHealth (free download)
- *Melissa: A Father's Lessons from a Daughter's Suicide*
Frank Page, president and CEO of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, learned firsthand the pain of losing a loved one to suicide when he and his wife, Dayle, lost their daughter, Melissa, to suicide in 2009. Writing from personal experience, he examines the biblical truths that carried him through such a painful time and that minister to him on dark days still known to come around.
- *The Anxiety Cure*
Panic anxiety is the number one mental health problem for women and second only to drug abuse among men. *The Anxiety Cure* provides proven, natural strategies for overcoming panic disorder and finding an emotional balance in today's fast-paced world.
- *The Minirth Guide for Christian Counselors*
A comprehensive resource for those who counsel from the Scriptures from a leading Christian counselor.



psychiatry and pastoral and moral theology at Duke Divinity School.

People who are depressed might have trouble praying or coming to church, and may lose hope, says Kinghorn, another one of the experts in the LifeWay study. In those moments of despair, a church community can offer reassurance and comfort.

In some ways, they can keep the faith for people who are really struggling.

“What can happen is that others can come alongside you and say, ‘I know you can’t hope right now, but we believe that hope is real and that God is real,’” he says.

One of the complications for Christians with mental illness is that they feel pressure to still grow spiritually.

LifeWay Research found that most pastors (76 percent) and family members (74 percent) felt a Christian with acute mental illness could thrive spiritually, even if their condition was not stable. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of people with mental illness also believe that someone could thrive spiritually even if their condition wasn't stable.

The experts in the LifeWay study, however, cautioned that stabilizing a person's mental health should come first. Christians can feel God's presence and comfort in the midst of their struggles with mental illness. But it's difficult to thrive spiritually if someone's mental illness is not stable.

That's especially true for an illness like schizophrenia.

"In schizophrenia, there is such a strong biological component that medications are a must," says Eric Achtyes, staff psychiatrist at Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services in Grand Rapids, Michigan. "You really can't do anything else until somebody is stable with a good medication regime. It's difficult to do anything else."

THERAPY AND MEDICATION

LifeWay Research found broad consensus among pastors, those with mental illness, and family members when it comes to psychological therapy and medication.

- More than 3 out of 4 (78 percent) of those with mental illness had received therapy. Most (79 percent) said therapy was effective.
- Almost all (94 percent) of those with mental illness said they'd been treated with medication, with 85 percent saying the medication was effective.

LifeWay Research found very little opposition to using medication to treat mental illness.

Almost no one in the three surveys said medication should "never" be used. More than half of those with mental illness (54 percent) said medications should be used any time they can relieve symptoms of acute mental illness. About a third of those with

mental illness said medication should be used in moderation.

Among pastors, 40 percent said medication should be used anytime to relieve symptoms, while 47 percent said medication should be used in moderation.

There were some differences over when it was best to use therapy versus when to give spiritual counsel to those with mental illness. About half of pastors (51 percent) said therapy should be used after sharing spiritual principles.

But only a quarter of those with mental illness said spiritual principles

The more we talk about mental illness and bring it out of the shadows, the more understanding and compassion we'll have."

— Eric Achtyes

should precede therapy. And about a third (34 percent) of those with mental illness said therapy should be used without any spiritual principles.

Stetzer was pleased to see the taboo of using medication to treat mental illness seems to have almost disappeared.

He says pastors and those with mental illness have seen that medications can help those with mental illness. It's no surprise, he says, that pastors and those with mental illness support their use.

But he worries at times that churches see mental illness solely as a medical

problem and forget about the spiritual needs to those who are mentally ill.

"I'm concerned that some Christians say, let the doctors take care of everything," he says. "We can't outsource spiritual care."

Dealing openly with mental illness can lead to better outcomes for those who struggle with depression or other conditions, says Achtyes.

But it also can lead to a healthier church environment for everyone.

"The reality is that we all know people who have had mental illness,

depression, anxiety, and other problems. The more we talk about [mental illness] and bring it out of the shadows, the more understanding and compassion we'll have, and I think the better care people will get," Achtyes told LifeWay Research. "And don't we really want our churches to be places of openness and of healing and a place where we can go with our challenges and our trials?" ■

BOB SMIETANA (@BobSmietana) is senior writer for Facts & Trends. Lizette Beard of LifeWay Research contributed to this article.

Breaking the silence

By Amy Simpson

HOW YOUR CHURCH CAN RESPOND TO MENTAL ILLNESS



Ten-year-old Amy Simpson poses with her mother while on family vacation.

I met your mom on Sunday.” My best friend’s mom smiled as she dried her hands on a kitchen towel. “I’ve seen her in church, but I had no idea she was your mom. She always sits so quietly, with her hands folded in her lap. She seems very nice.”

I smiled politely in response, and she went back to her work in the kitchen. It took me only a couple of seconds to push back the wave of pain and panic that always hovered at the edge of my life and threatened to wash over me at moments like these. I was in the habit of keeping those feelings at bay.

Even though my best friend and I went to the same church, there was a reason I had never introduced our mothers. There was a reason I didn’t host get-togethers at my house, invite my parents to school events, or rely on my mom for the kind of support teenage girls need. I was ashamed and terribly afraid of the stigma.

My friend’s mom was right: My mom was, and is, very nice. She also has a serious illness that filled those teenage years with confusion, fear, and grief. Her schizophrenia lived with our family for years, before I was even born, like a quiet but unwanted houseguest. When I was 14, that guest suddenly staged a coup, and before we knew what had happened, we were living in schizophrenia’s house.

Mom was hospitalized multiple times through my high school

years, and the decades since have brought a string of run-ins with the harsh effects of her disease: difficult and broken relationships, paranoia, public embarrassment, religious confusion, occult activities, homelessness, danger, arrest, conviction, and prison time.

Periods of stability and hope followed by another slow—or sometimes sudden—loss of the person we know and love. Battles with the shame and stigma that kept us quiet and isolated from each other for decades. Battles for the life and well-being of a woman we cherish, who still has a purpose and a place in this world.

I'm no longer ashamed of my mother's illness and my family's experience. I'm

proud that we've come this far, amazed by God's grace. And I'm astounded so many people are living right in the middle of stories very much like ours.

Ironically, when I was a teenager, I thought we were pretty much alone. I didn't fully understand what was happening in my family, and I had never heard anyone else talk about similar experiences.

This is part of what kept me and the rest of my family silent, hiding behind the same smiles everyone else was wearing. We had no idea our own silence made us complicit in our sense of isolation. Because others were silent too, we had no idea how many families were like ours.

UNDERSTAND THE CRISIS

When the subject of mental illness comes up, many people think first of the most serious, disruptive disorders like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and major depression. These are the types of illness that tend to be featured (usually inaccurately) in popular media, linked (again, inaccurately) with violence on the evening news, and associated with suicide.

But most people with mental illness do not die by suicide, hear hallucinatory voices, or commit acts of violence. Mental illness is a broad term for a variety of disorders in different categories, affecting thinking, feeling,

“People who live with mental illness, whether their own or someone else's, need to break the silence.”

— Amy Simpson



Family photo courtesy of Amy Simpson

Simpson and her mom at high school graduation



behavior, mood, social interaction, and self-expression. Mental illness is not a fringe experience best kept in the closet or under the rug.

Every year, 25 percent of the U.S. adult population suffers from a diagnosable mental illness. That's about equal to the total percentage of people diagnosed with cancer each year, those living with heart disease, people infected with HIV and AIDS, and those afflicted with diabetes—combined!

That equates to around 50 million people in the United States. And that's only in a given year. Because many mental illnesses (like depressive episodes) are short-term and not chronic, an even higher percentage of people are affected by a mental illness at some point in their lives.

The statistics are staggering, but they don't tell the whole story. Every case of mental illness represents a family affected in some way by that disease. Mental illness causes financial burdens

and hardships. A person with active symptoms may be unable to work.

Psychiatric medications, hospital stays, and residential care can be enormously expensive—when they're available. Our mental health care system

is badly broken and hard to navigate, and it can be difficult to access care. Furthermore, as with other forms of health care, the burden of managing care and treatment is on the person with the illness, who may not be able to manage the condition (and who may not even acknowledge or understand it).

Family members often witness the disintegration of a loved one's mental health, but lack the tools and legal right to intervene in any effective way. And if the loved one is old enough (age 12 in some states), the family also lacks access to medical diagnoses, records, and other information about treatment—unless permission is specifically granted in writing.

Doctors can be reluctant to diagnose disorders because of stigma and discrimination by insurance companies. Insurance companies pressure hospitals to shorten treatment. And short hospitalizations focused on stabilizing patients don't always set them up for long-term success.

For many families with mental illness, police officers become mental health workers by default in crisis situations. Some lose their loved ones to homelessness, jail, or prison. Many sources report that about 40 percent of homeless people have some kind of mental health problem, and 20 to 25 percent have serious mental illness.

The Department of Justice estimates that more than half of local, state, and federal inmates have symptoms of serious mental illness—ranging from 45 percent at the federal level to 56 percent in state prisons and 64 percent at the local jail.

Many families affected by mental illness live with special “rules” (Don't let Mom see that newspaper headline; Don't upset your brother; Don't talk about your feelings) designed to keep just one person happy or stable. For some, life is unstable, confusing, and full of worry, anxiety, and feelings of helplessness.

Some family members are plagued by guilt-producing questions (What did we do wrong?) and questions that can lead to a spiritual crisis (How could you let this happen, God?). Roles are reversed, families go through repeated cycles of grief and loss, and people feel the awful need to submit to shame and stay silent about their suffering.

HOPE IN THE CHURCH

People who live with mental illness, whether their own or someone else's, need to break the silence. They need to speak and be heard in the church and elsewhere. They need the church to break its own silence as well. So many have allowed stigma and fear to prevent acknowledgment that mental illness exists within the walls of churches. The silence sends a clear message that God is not interested in their suffering, serious problems have no place in the church, and our faith has no answer for hardships like theirs.

Compounding this tragedy is what research shows: The church is the first place many people go when they're looking for help with mental illness. Among people who have sought treatment, 25 percent have gone first to a member of the clergy. This is a higher percentage than those who have gone to psychiatrists, general medical doctors, or anyone else.

How should the church respond to this opportunity? Here are a few ideas:

- *Acknowledge universal human brokenness.* This is Christian doctrine at its most basic, but we sometimes forget to walk in the humility of the knowledge that we are all flawed and scarred and in need.
- *Teach about suffering.* Contradict the idea that we should expect an easy or

pain-free life on this earth.

- *Treat people like people.* Make eye contact, smile, say hello, and refuse to succumb to irrational fear. (If someone truly is dangerous, call the police. That's rational fear. But still recognize the very real and suffering person.)
- *Offer friendship.* We often think we're not qualified to help, but everyone is qualified to do this.
- *Do what you already do—provide meals and rides, visit them in the hospital, take care of their kids, help with expenses, ask how they're feeling.*
- *Talk about mental illness.* Mention it in sermons, classes, Bible studies, and public prayers.
- *Refer to mental health professionals.* Build a network of local professionals and make it widely available.
- *Be the church.* Recognize that professional mental health care is not a substitute for the social support, spiritual care, and loving community you can provide.
- *Start a support group ministry.* Check

out Fresh Hope (FreshHope.us) and Mental Health Grace Alliance (MentalHealthGraceAlliance.org) for resources.

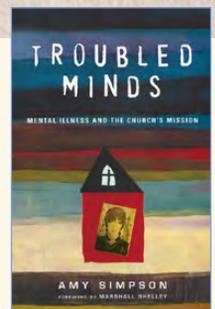
Ministry to people with mental illness and their families is not easy, quick, or fashionable. It may not even be rewarding. But it is right and fitting for people called to love as Jesus loves, to serve as “the pleasing aroma of Christ” in this world, and to represent His healing grace. ■

AMY SIMPSON (@aresimpson) is author of *Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church's Mission* and *Anxious: Choosing Faith in a World of Worry*. She also serves as editor of *Gifted for Leadership*, senior editor of *Leadership Journal*, a speaker, and a Co-Active personal and professional coach. You can find her at AmySimpsonOnline.com.

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Books by author
Amy Simpson

- *Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church's Mission*
- *Anxious: Choosing Faith in a World of Worry*



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Finding my way home

By Art Greco



PHOTOGRAPHY BY GARY FONG

Dealing with depression as a church leader

It was my day off. That meant I was doing one of my favorite things—working on a project in my garage. I was halfway through fixing the door on our spare refrigerator when all of a sudden my 34-year-old son Josh appeared.

He didn't speak. Instead, Josh stood there with tears in his eyes and an awful expression on his face, with a cellphone held in his outstretched hand.

I took the phone and read the news. Robin Williams was dead, a victim of suicide.

Josh, like many of us, was a fan of Williams. But he also had a personal connection.

We live not far from San Francisco, and Josh had a friend who used to live next door to William's wife Susan Schneider. Whenever Josh would visit his friend, he'd often see Williams and would wave greetings over the fence.

That wasn't the only reason for his shock.

"Dad," he asked, "when you were battling depression, did you ever seriously consider suicide?"

"Yes," I told him. "Sadly, I did."

After a silent and tender pause, Josh spoke again.

"I'm glad you dealt with it a different way, Dad," he said.

Josh's response touched me deeply—partly because it was so different from what those of us who've been ambushed by depression often hear.

Things like: "But why are you de-

pressed? You have so much to live for." Or some version of, "Just fix it," "Go watch a funny movie," or "But people love you so much."

That's what I recall hearing most often when I first revealed that depression—this uninvited and certainly unwanted mental illness—had taken up residence in me. How can I convey the deep, throbbing ache I felt the first time a friend told me to "Snap out of it"?

His advice was: "Just trust God and be happy."

Great. Here I was being sucked into the emotional version of a black hole, and he was encouraging me to simply hail a cab and get a ride home. His comments were well-intentioned, I suppose, but ridiculous.

No one else could see it, but in my world, it was as if I stood barefoot on a path, with a bed of white-hot coals blocking my way. The boots I needed to walk across the coals were placed just out of reach. I couldn't get to the boots without stepping on the coals, and I couldn't survive the coals without first lacing up the boots.

"Snapping out of it" seemed easy enough to my friend. He was watching from a distance, offering advice while

comfortably seated away from the heat.

Meanwhile, I also felt trapped, imprisoned by depression. Every uninformed and unhelpful piece of advice only intensified the sense of despair I felt and strengthened the bars of my moldy, rat-infested, emotional cell.

What I needed instead was someone to come and help me unlock the door so I could get out of this trap.

MY STORY

Let me explain how depression first took over my life.

It was the summer of 1988. At the time, our family lived in Portland, Oregon, where I was a church planter.

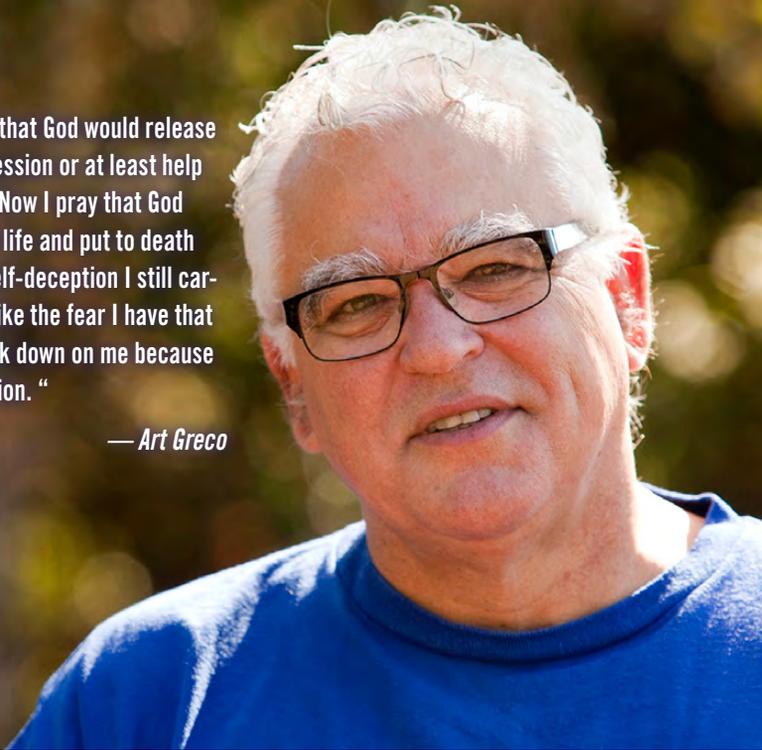
One day, I sat first in line at a red light in our town, our family's favorite Elmer's Restaurant on the left, the Union Gas Station on the right. Everything around me looked familiar. At least, it should have since I lived only blocks from that corner and traveled the route each day. But this day something bizarre happened.

I arrived at the intersection feeling normal. By normal I mean stressed out. But I'd grown used to the sensation of stress, assuming it was just a necessary by-product of the ministry of a church planter. My chest felt like it was in a vice, my head felt pressured, and I was a little dizzy—all sensations I had grown accustomed to over the years.

Then that "bizarre something" came.

I used to pray that God would release me from depression or at least help me survive it. Now I pray that God would heal my life and put to death some of the self-deception I still carry with me—like the fear I have that people will look down on me because of my depression. “

— Art Greco



About a quarter of pastors (23 percent), say they've experienced some kind of mental illness, while 12 percent say they received a diagnosis for a mental health condition.

Source: LifeWay Research

Its onset was quick, as though my senses were a PowerPoint and someone had just pushed the button that changed the slide.

Only in this case, the scene in front of me was unfamiliar and out of focus. I didn't know where I was, where I was going, or where I'd been. I just sat there, dazed, until the car behind me honked and startled me into creeping forward through the intersection.

I recall thinking: *I'll just drive until something looks familiar. I think I live close by.*

I turned left because it felt correct, then left again for the same reason.

I suspected that one of the houses on that block was mine, but I wasn't sure which one. *I'll push the button on the garage door opener, I thought. Wherever a garage door opens, that must be my house.*

Then I parked in the driveway of the house with the opening door, walked into the garage, climbed onto the freezer, and stared at the walls, trying to clear my head.

Not long after, I sat in a doctor's

office and learned that I'd been diagnosed with clinical depression.

But even more devastating was the doctor's prescription for healing. Since it didn't appear this uninvited illness was going to be leaving any time soon, he recommended I find another line of work.

"Sell cars, paint houses, work at McDonalds for all I care," he told me. "But stay away from leadership in a church—any church. Otherwise, you'll probably never fully heal."

Cue those hot coals and move the boots a bit farther away.

Cue the simplistic, overspiritualized advice of people whose idea of depression is the disappointment you feel when someone gets your parking space at the mall.

Cue the stigma of being seen as intellectually and emotionally suspect for the rest of your career.

God had called me to be a church planter, and to me that meant I wasn't allowed to quit. But I wasn't strong enough to stay in leadership.

Thankfully, God didn't leave me

stuck there. My family and leaders at our church rallied around me. They paid for me to get a second opinion from another doctor, who confirmed the diagnosis of clinical depression, and allowed me to get the professional help I needed.

They offered to give me six months without pay so I could get well. I didn't stay away quite that long—a decision that delayed my healing process—but I did take some time off. God used the combination of time off, medication, and counseling to restore me to emotional health.

A NEW DAY

A lot has changed since those days as a young church planter. I'm still a pastor, but I walk with an emotional limp.

The nightmare of clinical depression hasn't been turned into a Disney fairy tale. But in a strange way, its destructive power has worked some good in my life.

I used to pray that God would release me from depression or at least help me survive it. Now I pray that God would

heal my life and put to death some of the self-deception I still carry with me—like the fear I have that people will look down on me because of my depression. Or my oversized ego tempting me to pretend the illness doesn't exist or insisting I can't be sick because my church can't survive without me.

I pray those who read this article will never experience the pain that comes with severe and prolonged depression.

But in case you do, I want you to know there is hope.

It won't be easy. And you can't do it on your own. But you can get better.

And you are not alone. There are more than a few of us who have outlasted and outmaneuvered this disease, and have even been made deeper, quieter, and better through it. ■

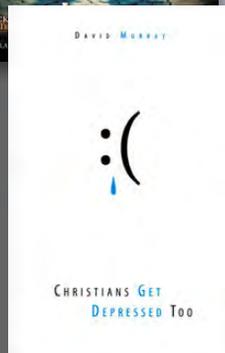
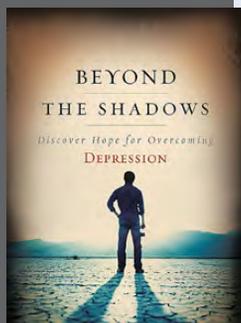
ART GRECO is senior pastor of Marin Covenant Church in San Rafael, California. He's the author of *God Kills: Spirituality of a Christian Pragmatist*.

DIG DEEPER

- *Beyond the Shadows: Discover Hope for Overcoming Depression*

An eight-session Bible study that walks participants through the experiences, feelings, and struggles common to depression.

- *Christians Get Depressed, Too* by David Murray



Depression and the ministry

By Mark Dance

After pastoring in a fog of clinical depression, I came very close to walking away from my church and the ministry five years ago. I had been pastoring for 22 years at the time, and was burned out and fed up—mostly with myself. Thanks to the help of my doctor and therapist, I would learn what role mental illness had in my decision-making. Fortunately, my depression was temporary and treatable, as most are if diagnosed early. However, many pastors struggle with mental illness in secret isolation—we have a role to play, expectations to live up to, and people to please. If you are a ministry leader who is struggling with ongoing depression, please consider these four suggestions.

1. Seek professional help

Self-diagnosis is usually a waste of time. My first conversation was with my medical doctor, then a licensed Christian therapist. It was a humbling, but rewarding experience for me.

2. Let your church minister to you

The stigma of depression, or any weakness, tempts us away from seeking help from those who love us most. I meet monthly with an accountability partner/friend, monthly with a therapist, and quarterly with a small group of supportive deacons. Along with my wife, this is my “Dance Team.”

3. Trust the Lord for healing

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail” (Luke 22:31).

Satan has plan for your life, but so does God! Although I don't believe it was God's will for Peter to fail, He obviously knew about and allowed Peter to go through the sifting and refining process so he could grow in both strength and humility. He would need both later.

We know in retrospect that God had big plans for Peter, but we also know God has plans for our ministries, too. Jesus is still praying for our good and His glory. Praying that our faith would not fail, even when we do.

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV).

4. Help someone else off the cliff

“And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32).

Several pastors and deacons talked me off that cliff of ministry suicide five years ago, and I will always be grateful to them. Stepping away from ministry and the church I loved and needed was neither in the best interest of my church, my family, or myself. I got a ministry recall and have used it countless times to help other pastors off that same cliff. There are many of us out there considering it. ■

MARK DANCE is associate vice president of pastoral leadership at LifeWay. Most recently, he served 13 years as a pastor in Conway, Arkansas.



Rethinking mental illness



The role of the church in recovery Q&A with Matthew Stanford

By Lizette Beard

Matthew Stanford is professor of psychology, neuroscience, and biomedical studies at Baylor University and the co-founder/executive director of the Grace Alliance (mentalhealthgracealliance.org), a non-profit organization that trains churches how to recognize mental illness and provides practical steps for churches to effectively minister to those living with mental illness and their families. He is a member of Antioch Community Church in Waco, Texas.

What is the unique impact a mental illness has on a person's faith?

Clients who struggle with mental illness often say they feel condemned or distanced from God and isolated from the church. They feel they cannot pray, that God doesn't listen to them. They often believe their illness shows a lack of faith. For instance, someone who struggles with depression has feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness. These are not thoughts they're in control of. These are physiological feelings that are then perceived by the brain as thoughts of, "I'm worthless. I can't be loved." If the individual is a person of faith, the first thought may be "God can't love me."

How should the church approach mental illness?

At Grace Alliance, we look at a person from a holistic perspective: physical, mental, spiritual, and relational. When a person is ill, it affects the whole person. In addition to lifestyle changes, medication, and therapy, there's also going to be spiritual intervention.

I look at mental illness much like diabetes. If a person has diabetes, they have to alter their diet and exercise. They may have to take medication that controls the symptoms of that disorder, but it doesn't cure the disorder. We need to consider the same things when we're dealing with mental illness.

We've found that faith can be incredibly therapeutic and empowering. It

really is the foundation of our hope. And without hope, there is no recovery. When we begin with a client, we try to re-establish what their identity is in Christ. From there we can move forward because now they understand hope isn't a feeling. Hope is a person—Jesus Christ. Regardless of the circumstances, there is hope. When ministering to people with mental illness, it needs to be about who they are in Christ, the rest they have in God, and the character of God—the love He has for them.

We also make sure they have some level of stability in their thinking. We help our clients receive proper medical care and make sure they're in a supportive environment.

What are some signs of hope family members or churches can observe?

The recovery process is minimizing the symptoms, understanding the illness, and taking ownership of one's own recovery, and then beginning to make decisions on one's own about getting better. We have a scale we show our clients. We want them to move from distress to stability, from stability to function, and from function to purpose. We help them understand where they are on that scale. As they move along, they become more personally involved in their recovery and what's going on in their lives. We try to help clients

and their family members see where they are now on that scale compared to where they were when we started.

What are some of the biggest discoveries churches and pastors are making about working with the mentally ill?

Churches are beginning to understand they have a huge role to play in mental health. They also are starting to interact with people who have increasingly serious mental illnesses, and they feel ill-equipped to help. People in the church often don't know what to do when someone has an illness affecting the brain.

What can pastors do to alleviate the stigma of mental illness?

It's up to the leadership of the church to help their congregation understand they have a role to play in mental health. The average congregant doesn't understand mental illness and is probably fearful.

Leaders can preach a sermon on mental health issues or host a general educational seminar on mental illness for the church. Allow people to give a testimony about their mental illness and how they've suffered. When people understand mental illness, it's easier to show grace, care, and concern.

How can the church help those with mental illness?

The church needs to treat individuals with mental illness the same way it treats anybody with an illness. Offer a supportive care structure, help them spiritually, help them understand where God is in the situation, and help them connect more fully to God in their suffering. Churches also can provide for physical needs. It's no different from how you would treat someone who had any other type of illness.

We've helped churches learn how to build connections with the mental health community in their location and have taught them how to make a proper referral. But that's not the end of the church's role. That's just the beginning.

We encourage churches to develop a team approach with the mental health care provider when they refer an individual. The church then becomes a supportive care community around that person. The church also serves as a spiritual guide to help the individual with his or her faith in the context of their mental illness and recovery. And the church needs to support the family.

The church's role is three-fold: relieve suffering, reveal Christ, and restore lives. ■

LIZETTE BEARD (@LizetteBeard) is project manager for LifeWay Research.



GROUPS MATTER

Ministry ideas for small groups

7 shifts for Bible study groups

By Philip Nation

The core ministry of a church will determine the trajectory of the whole church. If a church is built around a dynamic preacher/teacher, then it will affect how everyone views the Christian life and ministry. When the student ministry is the dominant feature in a congregation, then worship, fellowship, communication, and all the rest will change to accommodate it. Perhaps it is because, as humans, we like a default position. We find the influential force and fall in behind its wake.

The Bible study group ministry is often the chief and organizing ministry of a church. In all honesty, it is my preference. Even though I am one of the teaching pastors at my church, my hope is that people will choose their small group over my preaching every time. Our faith is a relational one; nothing can substitute for believers living interconnected lives.

It appears many churches struggle with the groups ministry of the church. It can happen in multiple environments: on campus, off campus, homes, bookstores, and coffee shops. It goes by a myriad of names: Sunday School, small groups, Bible study fellowships, or life groups.

But no matter where it is or what it's called, these smaller gatherings are a critical part of our spiritual development. Let me offer seven shifts for helping your Bible study groups better fulfill their purpose.



1. Timeframe: Move from thinking about the group as meeting for one hour to ministering for one week. In other words, it is not a weekly get-together but an every day ministry.

2. Framework: Move from organization to leadership. The groups system of your church is the training ground for leadership in the kingdom. Don't just organize people, raise up leaders.

3. Involvement: Move from a caste to freedom. A caste system dictates that your current "place" in culture will remain forever. Bible study groups involve the freedom to move, try new ministry opportunities, and grow into new places of God's mission.

4. Type: Move from closed to community. Many people discuss groups as either closed (we've made an agreement to do this study together as a group) or open (anyone is welcome to join at any time). Both have their purpose and place. But both need to focus on people. Our groups need to be about the community of people rather than

the lesson of the curriculum.

5. Perspective: Move from meeting to ministry. Groups gather for the purpose of the people, not for the sake of the calendar. Help your people (especially your leaders) understand that ministering to the people involved is more important than sustaining a great hour of meeting.

6. Reason: Move from teaching to transformation. An emphasis on teaching is an emphasis on the teacher. An emphasis on transformation is an emphasis on the group. If we reset our thinking here, we will reset our thinking on just about everything else.

7. Goal: Move from gather to scatter. Healthy groups exist for more than the people currently in attendance. Make the gathering important for the learning, ministry, and growth that scatters the church into the world for God's mission. ■

PHILIP NATION (@PhilipNation) is director of Adult Ministry Publishing at LifeWay and is the teaching pastor at The Fellowship, a multisite church in Nashville.



5 reasons to consider e-giving

By Matt Morris

We live in an increasingly digital world, and churches need to stay on top of things technologically.

Just as digital Bibles on smartphones and tablets have increased in popularity, so also e-giving has become much more common and important. For churches that don't know where to start with adding an e-giving option, and for churches that want to encourage greater e-giving, here are a few things to consider.

1. E-giving helps develop members' habit of giving regularly. Let's think optimistically. The sermon series you preached on stewardship worked. You have people in your congregation who have never given who want to start. You also have people in your congregation who have given sporadically before, but want to give on a regular basis. E-giving allows members to give regularly by setting up recurring tithes and offerings. According to a LifeWay Research study, churches that have implemented e-giving have seen an 8 percent increase in total giving, on average.

2. E-giving allows you to engage younger generations. Take out your wallet and see how much cash you have. Better yet, take out your checkbook. Remember those? Do you even carry a checkbook anymore? I sure don't. And if you ask me to borrow a dollar, chances are I'll say, "Sorry. I don't carry cash." I'm probably not alone.

According to a Barna study, 39 percent of Christian Millennials give online, and 20 percent give via text. Naturally, e-giving better serves younger generations in their giving habits. Online, mobile, and text giving allow you to reach to even more people and meet them where they are.

3. E-giving can be safe and secure.

When I talk to pastors, one of the top reasons they give for not offering online giving is that it's not safe. E-giving is exactly like online banking. It's not uncommon for people to pay all or most of their bills online. The payment card industry has levels of security that need to be met before a transaction can be processed. That's true for e-giving as well.

4. E-giving can be a worship experience.

Another reason pastors give for not offering e-giving is that it isn't worshipful. However, I think the worship experience is what you make it. Making stewardship a priority by sitting down with your spouse and children one night a week and giving your tithe can be a worship experience. Parents can use that opportunity to teach their kids that God calls us to be cheerful givers and why we are called to give.

5. E-giving can provide flexibility to you and your members.

There are various mediums of e-giving. The most common is online giving, allowing your members to give through your website. The other less common forms are

mobile giving, text giving, and kiosk giving. Some people may prefer to give on your website, while others may prefer to give via mobile app or text. Another area of flexibility is payment method. Some churches are opposed to accepting credit cards and only want to accept debit cards and checks, while others may want to accept checks only.

Partnering with a company that offers all three is the best scenario. Twenty:28 is a solution LifeWay launched earlier this year that offers website development, mobile apps, and e-giving in one ecosystem.

Another consideration is the possibility of funding your church's digital presence with e-giving. Twenty:28 customers who meet a giving threshold, based on the pricing plan they choose, will receive their website and mobile app free of charge. In essence, the more a church uses it, the less it costs. This enables churches to better connect with their congregation and community through their website and mobile app, while allowing members to serve their church through faithful stewardship.

Good stewardship and generosity are an integral part of following Christ, individually and collectively as the church. Giving truly is a worship experience, and e-giving is just another way for people and churches to honor God with the resources He has graciously provided for us. ■

MATT MORRIS (@MattMorris80) leads digital strategy and electronic publishing for LifeWay.



Guard Against Embezzlement

Advice on how to combat a growing problem

By Bob Smietana

Dana Sue Eckhart's life unraveled a little bit at a time. Eckhart, the former finance manager at her church in Stillwater, Oklahoma, was having trouble paying her bills after her mortgage payments skyrocketed in 2009.

The church, on the other hand, had plenty of money in the bank. So Eckhart decided to borrow a bit.

Then a bit more.

By the time she was caught, Eckhart had written more than \$60,000 in checks from the church bank account to herself and nearly \$68,000 in checks to her credit card company.

All told, Eckhart admitted embezzling \$141,016.

"I started falling into the trap of 'I just need a little to make ends meet and I'll pay it back,'" she told a judge at her sentencing hearing this past August, according to

published reports.

That's a familiar story to Verne Hargrave, a certified fraud examiner and CPA with Arlington, Texas-based PSK LLC.

Hargrave has spent the last decade warning church leaders about the dangers of fraud. Few listen until it's too late, he says.

"There's the idea that this can't happen here," says Hargrave.

But it can.

Over the last five years, 425 churches insured by the Merrill, Wisconsin-based Church Mutual reported embezzlement crimes. The losses at those churches totaled \$3.3 million dollars. In one case, a church leader stole \$1.6 million from a building fund over an eight-year period.

Among other recent embezzling cases:

- A church board member in Oakland was indicted in April for allegedly diverting more than \$500,000 to his personal accounts.
- The ex-bookkeeper of a church in Virginia was convicted in March of embezzling more than \$760,000.
- A San Diego pastor was sentenced to five years in prison for stealing more than \$3 million from the congregation.

A recent study of 132 churches published in *Fraud Magazine* found 13.4 percent of those churches experienced fraud over a five-year period.

Church legal expert Frank Sommerville believes church embezzling is even more common than what we hear about. Most times, he says, embezzle-

ment goes unreported.

"Churches want to hush it up," he says. "It's a secret sin. We don't want to know about it."

SAFEGUARD AGAINST PRESSURE

Churches face a number of challenges in preventing embezzlement. Congregations are built on trust. And trust makes embezzling possible.

"That's where churches make their big mistake," says Hargrave. "They think only crooks embezzle."

A 2014 study of 1,483 cases of workplace fraud in more than 100 countries by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) found that few (5 percent) people who committed fraud had a past criminal record. Less than 1 in 10 (9.3 percent) had been fired from a job for fraud in the past.

More than half (52 percent) had worked for their employer for at least six years before committing their crimes. Few (6.8 percent) began their fraud on the first year on the job.

Instead, says Hargrave, embezzlers are often trusted employees who are under some kind of outside pressure and find themselves in need of money.

That pressure can show up in a variety of ways. A person's spouse becomes ill or loses their job, and all of a sudden, there is a financial crisis. Addictions, unexpected expenses, or a family crisis can put people in a situation where they need cash fast.

That kind of **pressure** is one side

of what fraud experts call the fraud triangle. And it can cause a person to make a terrible decision.

Experts like Hargrave say church leaders need to know what's going on in the lives of people who handle money in the church.

That way, church leaders can offer help if they can. And they also can safeguard the church—and the employee or volunteer—from the threat of embezzlement.

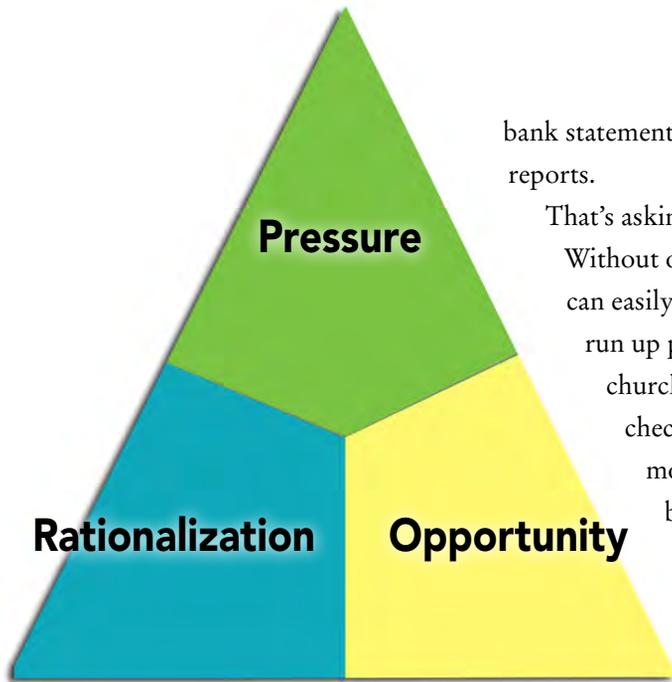
"One of the things we recommend is that you know your people as best you can," says Hargave. "Look for signs that things are not right at home."

MAKE IT HARD FOR PEOPLE TO EMBEZZLE

To be successful, an embezzler needs access to money with no oversight. It's what fraud experts refer to as **opportunity**, the second side of the fraud triangle.

Hargrave says most churches go to great lengths to keep people from stealing from the offering plate. They have two or more people count the collection, and then make sure the tithes and offerings are locked up right away. But they don't always pay attention to how money is spent. Instead, churches often put too much responsibility in the hands of one person.

For example, in about half (48 percent) of the churches surveyed by *Fraud Magazine*, the same person who writes the checks also reconciles the



The Fraud Triangle

bank statements and creates the financial reports.

That’s asking for trouble.

Without oversight, an embezzler can easily create false invoices, run up personal charges on the church credit card, or write checks to themselves for months or even years

before they get caught.

By then, tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars could be missing.

According to the ACFE, the median workplace fraud lasted

18 months and totaled \$130,000 in losses.

“The shame of it is that very few of the cases we are involved in are high-tech scams,” Hargrave says. “They are extremely simple processes that could have been prevented with a handful of safeguards.”

The most important safeguard is what’s known as “segregation of duties.” That’s accountant-speak for assigning financial duties to more than one person.

For example, if the church office manager writes the checks, then someone else should balance the checkbook and prepare the financial reports. A church finance committee should review the actual bank statements (either in paper or online) to make sure the numbers add up.

All credit card purchases should be reviewed as soon as possible. And no checks should be signed ahead of time or be made out to cash.

Experts also suggest churches have as few bank accounts as possible. Sometimes embezzlers will use a forgotten or overlooked account to help them steal money.

These kinds of measures can help keep good people honest and make embezzlers think twice about the risk of being caught.

“The more barriers you put up, the harder it’s going to be for people to steal from you,” says Sommerville.

TREAT YOUR PEOPLE WELL

The third leg of the fraud triangle is **rationalization**. Embezzlers often convince themselves that their actions are justified.

Sometimes they decide to “borrow” money for a short period of time, with the intention of paying it back. Other times they’re resentful of their employer, and steal as a way of getting back at them.

Or perhaps they feel like the church isn’t paying them what they’re worth, and they steal as a way of making up for wages they think they are due.

Being underpaid doesn’t excuse embezzlers. But it can fuel a sense of resentment, which can lead to bad consequences for a church.

Who commits church fraud?

- 42% are Treasurers
- 15% are Administrators
- 11% are Pastors

How they do it:

- 29% use Checks
- 23% use Cash
- 21% use Credit Cards

Source: Church Mutual

TIME TO CALL A LAWYER

Embezzlement or other fraud is often revealed in a variety of ways. A check unexpectedly bounces. A vendor complains they haven't been paid. A credit card company calls about an account that no one knows about. Or someone notices a financial report doesn't add up. At that point, Sommerville suggests church leaders call a lawyer for advice before doing anything else.

Their lawyer can look at the books, and if things seem awry, can hire a fraud expert or accountant to review the church's account. If a lawyer hires the fraud expert, then their findings can be kept confidential.

The important thing is to get the facts straight before confronting a suspected embezzler. That way a church can avoid making a false or incomplete accusation.

"It's a landmine if you falsely accuse them," Sommerville says, "and a landmine if you don't accuse them of everything."

If they are confronted too early in the process, embezzlers may try to minimize their wrongdoing by admitting to taking a small amount of money and offering to pay the church back. Church leaders may be tempted to accept that first offer. But that's a mistake, says Sommerville.

"You don't want to settle with them and get a check for \$2,500—and then realize, they stole \$50,000," he says.

Church leaders also have to decide

whether or not to call the police, which is a fairly complicated issue.

Proving someone has embezzled takes a lot of time. If an alleged embezzler has only taken a few thousand dollars, the police or district attorney may be reluctant to spend the time and money needed to prosecute the case, says Sommerville.

On the other hand, if an embezzler isn't charged with a crime, that makes it easier for them to go to another church and do the same thing. The IRS also considers embezzled money or other money from illegal activity as taxable income, and churches may be required to report it.

Whatever happens, a church is unlikely to recover any funds from an embezzler. The money is usually long gone.

Nearly 6 in 10 (58 percent) of organizations in the ACFE report having received no restitution once the fraud was discovered. Only 14 percent recovered their losses.

And losing money isn't the worst part, says Hargrave.

The recriminations, anger, and sense of betrayal inside the church linger long after the embezzler is gone.

"There's usually a report to the church and the final sentence is 'the finance committee has implemented new accounting procedures,'" Hargrove says. "Those are often famous last words." ■

BOB SMIETANA (@BobSmietana) is senior writer for Facts & Trends.

Fraud Prevention Tips

- **Split up financial duties.** Never have the same person writing checks and reconciling bank statements. The more eyes on the church's finances the better.
- **Require mandatory vacations.** Make sure the people who handle the church's finances take a break each year. It's hard to maintain a fraud if other people have access to the books and bank statements.
- **Don't be eager to sign checks.** Sign checks only when all information is entered on the check and supporting documentation is available. Never pre-sign a check or make checks out to cash.
- **Keep an eye on credit cards.** Keep a close eye on credit card statements to ensure they are used for official business only.
- **Be careful when spending money.** Maintain competitive bidding for major purchases and contracts. Create policies for cash disbursements, expenses and travel, purchasing guidelines, petty cash, and conflicts of interest.



Recovering Redemption

A Q&A WITH MATT CHANDLER

By Matt Erickson



Matt Chandler serves as lead pastor of the Village Church, a multisite church across the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. His most recent book and related Bible study, *Recovering Redemption*, aims to help Christians start living like they actually believe in the power of redemption. The abundant life Jesus promises His followers is real and available. We asked Matt to talk about our need to “recover redemption.”

Why is change so hard? It can seem as if our only options are giving up or trying harder—yet again, and against all odds. What’s wrong with this picture?

Chandler: Several things collide when we talk about change, sanctification, or transformation. A lot of promises have been made that aren’t rooted in Scripture.

One reason change is difficult for us is that the process moves slower than we want it to. If you grew up in church or you grew up around people who taught the Bible, there’s a perception of a set of silver bullets that will set fire to your relationship with Christ and generate transformation quickly. In reality there aren’t any silver bullets.

I think testimonies of, “I never struggled after that,” or “I got saved and I never craved anymore”—although good and awesome and I praise God for them—are not normative. If that’s the testimony we’re always putting in front

of people, then ultimately they can grow disheartened.

Change is difficult for us because our flesh is strong. Yes, Christ is stronger than our flesh, but the process by which He removes those things and transforms us is life-long and not instantaneous.

We need to teach that more clearly, and explain to people the fight to lean in to Jesus and trust Him can last for decades around certain issues that are deeply embedded into our flesh patterns.

Talk about misguided attempts at redemption through: ourselves, others, the world, and religion. Why do these attempts fail us?

Each of these fake saviors we run to end up enslaving us. You can look back on who you were 10 years ago and realize that guy wasn’t as smart, talented, or together as he thought he was. And then 10 years from now you’ll look back on who you are today and think that again.

“Experiencing and understanding the supremacy and beauty of Jesus Christ is what we’re looking for that ultimately conquers and overcomes the other desires of our hearts.”

— Matt Chandler

The idea there will one day be a version of me this side of heaven that satisfies me goes contrary to the Word of God and contrary to our experience and reality. So, when I haven’t put my hope in Jesus, but I’ve put my hope in myself to make me better, I become enslaved to, “I’ve got to get better; I’ve got to do this better,” which results in comparisons to someone else’s perceived success.

And if I think someone else is more successful than me, they become a threat to me. Or if someone fails, then I get to rejoice in those failures because that exalts me. That’s how you enslave yourself when you try to redeem yourself.

If your tendency is to try to redeem yourself through others, then you’ve got relationships where you’re using people to try to feel better about yourself. Once again you’ve enslaved yourself, because their acceptance of you might come and go, where the Lord’s acceptance is steadfast and unmoving.

As for the world and religion—trinkets and toys only satisfy for a certain amount of time, and then we have to have new trinkets and toys. Religion is similar.

Religion is like trusting in yourself and others, except with a choir robe on. So all of these pursuits end up with you being enslaved to them, rather than ending in the rest and freedom found in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

How do we experience more of God’s love? Isn’t that the ultimate solution to our wandering hearts?

Experiencing and understanding the supremacy and beauty of Jesus Christ is what we’re looking for that ultimately conquers and overcomes the other desires of our hearts. How we go about it varies, but here is what should be true about everyone: We should be rightly seeing Jesus Christ for who He is and what He has done.

The way we know He is not a god of our own making is through the Word of God. Once we see Jesus for who He is according to the Scriptures, and gain an honest understanding of who we are, we will then begin to marvel at God’s long-suffering with us, His grace and mercy toward us, and His love of us despite us. We will begin to see and savor Jesus like we’ve always wanted to.

The tag team of guilt and shame can do a number on us. Explain the difference between the two, and more important, how we can be free from them.

Guilt is almost always tied to an infraction of some kind. We’ve broken a rule, so we are guilty. If you feel guilty for lying, it’s because you’ve broken the rule, the moral command that says, don’t lie.

But shame doesn't necessarily work like that. In fact, we can feel shame when there is no breaking of the law at all. We can feel ashamed of where we live, or what we drive, or our level of education. Another reality is that shame can combine with guilt; breaking a rule can lead to not just guilt, but shame over the infraction. Shame is almost always built around identity and how I see myself. I feel shame when I live in such a way that opposes how I see myself or how I want other people to see me.

For example, if I want people to see me as having it all together and being a hard worker, but in reality I'm lazy, then shame can creep in. So that will hit my heart hard on a day when I haven't done anything. Instead of completing the task I was supposed to, I sat on my couch and watched TV for five hours and did nothing else. I see myself as being hard-working and yet the reality of my life is that I'm lazy. When those two things collide, shame is born.

But the answer to both guilt and shame is found once again in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus has taken our guilt upon Himself on the cross and fully absorbed God's wrath toward our guilt so there is no condemnation left for us. In fact, in Romans 8, Paul asks who can bring a charge against God's elect, who can even charge me? Because my sin and guilt have been paid for—it's not

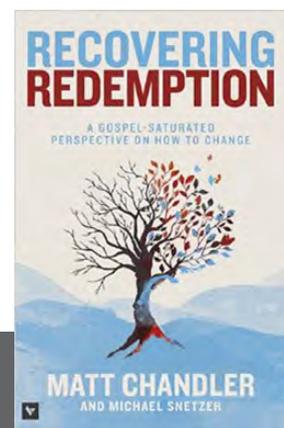
that I am innocent as much as it is I am forgiven and justified completely. So that takes care of guilt, and then shame can vanish when I understand God's delight in me as His child. Not only have I been forgiven, but I've also been adopted and been called a son. To understand God's delight in me eradicates and destroys shame in a way nothing else can.

You close the book encouraging us to remember joy is the engine of sustainable growth. Expand on that, please.

The motive behind everything we do is joy. So we all pursue our own joy.

What I wanted to do in the book and even what we want to do here at the Village, is to continually put before people that if Christ is the fullness of life and joy, our pursuit of Christ is a hedonistic pursuit. We are to pursue Jesus Christ like He is the treasure buried in a field that we would be willing to sell everything in order to have. That's what I mean by joy being the engine. To pursue joy at all costs. Not just happiness in the moment but deep-seated, sustaining joy in Jesus Christ. ■

MATT ERICKSON (@_Matt_Erickson) is managing editor of *Facts & Trends*.



DIG DEEPER

- *Recovering Redemption*, by Matt Chandler and Michael Snetzer



Time for a check up

Assessment helps church remember its mission

By Bob Smietana

It was time for things to change at Lakeview Church in Hickory, North Carolina. The church's longtime pastor had stepped down in 2012 and the congregation was looking for a new pastor. But they didn't know quite where they were headed as a church, says Jerry Hurley, pastor to seniors at Lakeview.

"We were searching for an identity we could share with potential pastors but didn't have one," says Hurley, who served as the church's interim pastor in 2012.

Lakeview was relatively healthy, with a congregation of about 230 on Sundays. But they'd become a bit too comfortable with the status quo.

"We'd become a really good country club," Hurley says. "But we weren't doing a good job of getting outside the walls and sharing the gospel."

Then a member of the search committee suggested they use the Transformational Church Assessment Tool—known as TCAT—to help them plan for the future. The search committee member heard about the TCAT from the director of missions at the local association and felt it would be of help.

Church members took the 80-question online assessment, which was developed as part of a long-term, LifeWay Research study of effective discipleship that included surveys of 7,000 pastors and 20,000 church members from 123 denominations. They got feedback on seven areas of spirituality.

Using the TCAT, church leaders discovered what they were doing well and what wasn't working. Among their strong points were overseas mission work and charitable service to the community in Hickory, a town of about 40,000 located about an hour east of Asheville.

“From a missions standpoint, we weren't just strong sending money,” Hurley says. “We were strong sending people out into the community.”

The congregation was also good at making newcomers feel welcome. But church members rarely invited new people or shared their faith. They also were losing younger members, who felt out of touch with the church's more traditional worship.

More importantly, says Hurley, church leaders discovered the church had gone

into survival mode rather than looking toward the future.

“We realized that over a 20 year period, we had gotten comfortable with some bad habits,” Hurley says. “We were able to show our church that we were more inwardly focused.”

Since then, the church has focused more on evangelism. They also went to a blended service that leans more toward contemporary than traditional.

“We realized that over a 20 year period, we had gotten comfortable with some bad habits.”

— Jerry Hurley, pastor to seniors at Lakeview

At the time they took the TCAT, the church drew about 230 to services. They are now at about 275. “We're bumping up against 300 on some Sundays,” he says.

Taking the TCAT helped the church remember its mission and plan for the future, says Hurley. He recommends other churches use the TCAT as well.

“If you don't know how you're doing, you don't know where you're going. I consider it the best-kept secret at LifeWay—I had no idea it existed.”

More information about the TCAT can be found online at tc.lifeway.com. ■

BOB SMIETANA (@BobSmietana) is senior writer and content editor of Facts & Trends.

High-tech homiletics

A CONVERSATION ABOUT TECHNOLOGY AND PREACHING

Interview by Matt Erickson

Should technology be used in sermon preparation and delivery? If so, how much and in what ways? Those aren't easy questions to answer—and there's no "right" answer that applies to every preacher and every context. Certainly, technology can be a great help if used wisely. But it can also distract from the message when relied on too heavily.

We asked three pastors from different ministry contexts to share their thoughts on technology and preaching.



Matthew Browne is the teaching pastor of Roswell Community Church in Roswell, Georgia, a suburb north of Atlanta. RCC is a fast-growing, mid-sized church that currently meets in an elementary school.



Darryl Ford is the lead pastor of Ikon Community Church in the East Lake area of Atlanta, Georgia. Ikon launched in September and is looking to impact their community with the gospel.



Thomas Cucuzza is the founder and senior pastor of Northland Bible Baptist Church in St. Cloud, Minnesota, where he has served since 1981.

What does good preaching mean to you?

MB Browne: Good preaching is biblically saturated teaching that always leads a person to the gospel and not just to life principles or self-improvement strategies. It offers Christ as the answer to our problem, and it offers Him freely.

DF Ford: Good preaching is communicating the intent of the text as the very heart of God. It should lead hearers beyond principles to a person—Jesus Christ. And it should engage and direct peoples’ affections toward Jesus’ ministry of reconciliation between God and man, between people, and ultimately for all of creation (see Colossians 1:20).

TC Cucuzza: Good preaching means you are preaching the Word of God and letting it speak, and not making the Bible fit your own ideas. We do a lot of expository, verse-by-verse, preaching and teaching in our church.

How has technology impacted the way you prepare to preach? What technologies do you use?

MB Browne: The primary way it has impacted me is in my studying. Typically the only book I have open now is my Bible. The other resources I use are online, which has saved me a lot of time and money. And I preach from a tablet.

TC Cucuzza: Technology has had a great impact on my preparation and preaching. I have been an avid WORDsearch user for years. It allows me to go deep into the Word of God and explore cross-referencing, word studies, and topics in much more detail than I ever would be able to with physical books, but in a very natural and flexible way. While it certainly is time-saving, I see it more as an aid to thoroughness, and therefore giving our people the best explanation of the text I can.

DF Ford: Technology is an integral part in my sermon preparation. I regularly use Logos software for commentaries, Greek/Hebrew word studies, and historical/archeological information.

How can we use technology to help, not hinder, the proclamation of God’s Word?

MB Browne: I think we shouldn’t be afraid of new technology.

However, if we’re using technology to appear “relevant,” we’re not serving the people anymore, but only ourselves. I think it’s in the attempt to appear “relevant” that our use of technology can come off as gimmicky. At our church, we do simple things like projecting the Bible verses on the screen to help people see what they’re hearing. (We also pass out Bibles before each sermon.) Sometimes people text

in questions, which we’ll address. Also, things like movie clips can be effective if not overused.

TC Cucuzza: Technology can help by saving time, which frees us up to meet the needs of people. But with Bible study, this can backfire and actually hinder by having so many resources to read and study that you can spend too much time on it. It is a matter of prayer, honesty, and balance.

Also, an iPad is a great companion when visiting people in the hospital, at their homes, or in a coffee shop. I have ministered to people dying in the hospital with my iPad by reading Scriptures, looking up verses that come to mind, playing them music, jotting things down that they need so I can meet those needs and not forget. I know much of this can be done manually with several tools, but I prefer having it all in one place and having it synchronize and backed up with my desktop. I also preach from my iPad in the pulpit.

Has using visual technology ever backfired on you?

MB Browne: We’ve had videos not start or the audio is off. We connected through Skype once to a mission team in Europe. It wasn’t the smoothest thing we’ve ever done, but the opportunity for visual connection with our people was worth the awkwardness.

How important is it to use 21st-century technology when communicating the gospel in the 21st century?

MB Browne: I think it depends on your culture. There are a lot of churches using cutting-edge technology that are growing and discipling many people. There are also churches experiencing similar growth that sing old songs and pray out of the Book of Common Prayer. The most significant principle for churches regarding technology is that it be used well.

DF Ford: I think using up-to-date technology can be a great aid to communicating clearly to your people. Utilizing common devices and methods of communication isn't compromise; it's relevant contextualization. People want to know I'm not only good at explaining Scripture, but that I'm also capable of understanding and explaining people and culture, including some of the latest technology.

TC Cucuzza: It shouldn't become overly complicated. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). This is an issue of "seeing" the Scriptures with your eyes and ears. Jesus said the words that He spoke were spirit and life.

Do you think the popularity of visuals in preaching is helping or hurting the church?

MB Browne: If you're not a visual learner you probably think it's distracting. However, if you're a visual learner like my wife, then you're thinking, "Finally!" There's no reason to ignore an entire group of learners just because it's "not the way we've done it."

DF Ford: I think it depends on whether or not the visuals are sufficiently connected to the sermon and message of the text. In some cases, eye-popping, heart-pulling graphics can work to hide the scriptural or theological weaknesses of a sermon. In other cases, visuals work to clarify and augment a well-prepared sermon. The strength of a visual for a sermon is usually directly related to the level of preparation that went into the sermon. People learn through multiple forms of communication. Our goal should be to meet people where they are, albeit without compromising. We can become socially tone deaf if we refuse to communicate with people on Sundays in ways they're familiar with.

TC Cucuzza: In many cases visuals help by keeping people's attention. But they can be overdone and hurt people by getting away from the Scriptures themselves. Too many visuals can lead to distracted people

who focus on the "coolness factor" and not on the Word. The Bible is where the power is.

What are some ways to keep people actively engaged in a service?

MB Browne: Try to make the sermon feel like it addresses the questions of normal people in your congregation. I love exegetical preaching. In our church, we mainly work through books of the Bible. However, if a pastor is more concerned with covering everything in a verse or passage than he is with inviting his people to cast their burdens onto Jesus, then I think he's missed the point.

DF Ford: We should be open to multiple ways of engaging the congregation. We should pay attention to the latest findings in educational theory and talk to experts in the field. Many would argue that the 40-minute, one-way monologue isn't the most effective to communicate to everyone. Options like allowing for Q&A after the sermon, and allowing for people to tweet or email questions during or after the sermon could be effective ways of engaging people during the sermon. ■

MATT ERICKSON (@_Matt_Erickson) is *managing editor of Facts & Trends*.



8 ways to keep college students in church

By Amanda Wood Williams

When it comes to church attendance among college students, statistics are concerning: many young adults don't attend church, even if they attended as children. According to a 2007 study by LifeWay Research, 70 percent of young adults stopped attending church for at least a year between ages 18 to 22—during the time when most Americans attend college.

So what can churches do to curb the number of dropouts? Based on a survey of church-going college students by Dr. Donald W. Caudill and Benjamin J. Payne at Gardner-Webb University, here are eight ways to keep young adults coming back to church.

1. Be strategic about welcoming young adults to church. College students are looking for a safe place to relax, away from the stress and busyness campus life. Offer a stress-free, welcoming home-away-from-home for young adults.

2. Reach out to students who live near your church. More than 94 percent of those surveyed say they would prefer to attend a church located near their places of residence.

3. Recognize what students are looking for in a local church. Young adults are looking for excitement at church—but that excitement comes from a surprising source. Most students (89 percent) say the sermon—and their perception of

it as exciting—would motivate them to attend church. By contrast, only 53 percent indicate they prefer rock music, professional lighting, and engaging media in church.

4. Allow students to help. Millennials have gained a reputation for being one of the most altruistic generations in decades. What better vehicle for helping others can be found than the local church? Most students surveyed (86 percent) say volunteer opportunities at church appeal to them, and more than 60 percent say they look for opportunities to participate in mission trips.

5. Teach the Bible. Almost 84 percent of students report they attend church to learn more about the Bible. Students are hungry for the Word of God as they grapple with new ideas and challenges to their faith; it's imperative to provide them with biblical teaching as they navigate these uncharted waters.

6. Spend time getting to know young adults. College students often attend class hours away from their hometowns, and any new environment can be a scary place. Familiarity—a sense of belonging—is something they seek. Personal relationships are foundational when building that sense of belonging, and the most important relationship is, perhaps, the relationship between young adults and their pastors. Almost 8-in-10 students surveyed say knowing their pastor personally is important.

7. Encourage diversity. Almost 76 percent of students surveyed indicate they like churches where they can meet people from many cultures. Consider partnering with other churches for special events that encourage cultural awareness.

8. Offer free food. Poor college students may seem cliché; nevertheless, free food is a huge draw for young adults. More than 68 percent of students surveyed say that all things being equal, they would attend a church that offered free food on a regular basis.

When it comes to attracting young adults, consider all the factors that could keep students away from church—from the mundane busyness of college life to deeper spiritual issues of doubt that often correspond to reaching adulthood in today's culture. Try the above solutions and keep track of young adult attendance to see if your congregation is making progress attracting—and retaining—young adult interest.

Most important, shower the college-age students in your congregation with love, understanding, and prayer, knowing you are planting seeds that will produce spiritual fruit in their lives for years to come. ■

AMANDA WOOD WILLIAMS is a freelance writer with a deep interest in helping local churches attract new members who become passionate followers of Christ.



The song of the redeemed:

A conversation with Keith Getty

By John Greco

It's no accident the the hymnody of Keith and Kristyn Getty has taken the nation—and the world—by storm. Their music reflects the deep and rich theological truths longed for by both younger and older generations of worshipers.

The husband-wife team from Northern Ireland are passionate about writing songs that congregations are able to sing together and that have strong biblical substance.

With his friend Stuart Townend, Keith co-wrote the immensely popular hymn, “In Christ Alone.” Sung in churches around the world for more than a decade, it has arguably done more for the modern hymn movement than any other.

Still Getty says neither “In Christ Alone” nor any of the other songs he’s written with Townend or Kristyn, are part of some new trend.

Instead, those songs are meant to do what hymns have always done—help people learn the faith through the words they sing.

“It is a means of putting into our minds, into our hearts, and into our lives words of truth that help us to know God,” he says.

During our conversation, Keith walked me through the history of hymns, starting with Scripture, from the Song of Moses and the Psalms to the words of the prophets and the hymns of the early church. Then there are the songs that missionaries and evangelists used to take Christianity around the world in the last 150 years.

“People learned their faith,

and have learned their faith since the beginning of time, through what they sing,” he says.

And singing as a congregation, Keith reminded me, has been one of the hallmarks of Christians around the world.

“I asked a friend of mine, ‘What was the most meaningful worship experience you’ve ever been a part of?’” says Keith. “He told me about a time with North Vietnamese believers. They were sitting around a table, whispering hymns in rhythm for fear of being caught but for the joy of being together.”

That kind of experience is “a microcosm of heaven,” Keith says.

Today, instead of uniting God’s people, worship music often divides them. Some like hymns and reject new songs. Others prefer newer worship songs and look down on older songs. As a worship leader and songwriter, that worries Keith.

“God’s people have a history of singing new songs but they also have a history of singing songs that have been passed on from generation to generation” he says.

“So we want to encourage people to engage in songs from the past, but we also want them to sing new songs they themselves can pass on.”

“In Christ Alone,” like so many of the songs Keith’s had a hand in writing, is a hymn at home in the view of

worship music Keith has just described. From the first note to the last, a picture of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection-victory is painted with words.

The melody insists on being sung in a congregational setting. And though the song fits neatly within the rich heritage of historical hymnody, it is refreshingly new and is sure to be passed on for generations to come.

There is something familiar in their songs, and there is a depth to the lyrics. It is the truth contained in those memorable tunes that grabs a worshiper’s attention.

Keith says theology in songwriting is important, but there’s more to it than that.

“People say hymns have to be good theology with a sing-able melody,” he says. “While there’s a strong element of truth to that, it’s really only a half-truth.”

Keith has my full attention, as I realize I’m guilty of spreading this apparent half-truth.

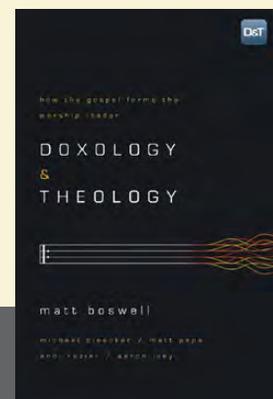
“What we actually need is beautiful poetry that lifts our eyes to the God of the universe, that arrests our emotions, fascinates our minds, and sticks in our memories,” he says. “And this poetry ought to be married to melodies that are so sing-able, they captivate us and all those around us—so much so that we want to sing them over and over and pass them on to our children. That’s what we really need.”

Keith says he’s encouraged by the state of worship in the church today.

“I think there are more people in the church today taking seriously the content of songs than there were, say, 15 years ago. That’s a good thing.”

And for a man who takes pride in crafting tunes that were meant to be expressed with instruments, Keith hasn’t lost sight of what’s most important: “The majority of the people in the world who sing ‘In Christ Alone’ don’t have music, given how much it’s sung in China and India and other places. We don’t actually need all the music, all that stuff. The golden bit is God’s people getting together and singing.”

JOHN GRECO is a freelance writer living in Atlanta, Georgia.



DIG DEEPER

- GettyMusic.com
- *Doxology & Theology* (B&H) by Matt Boswell



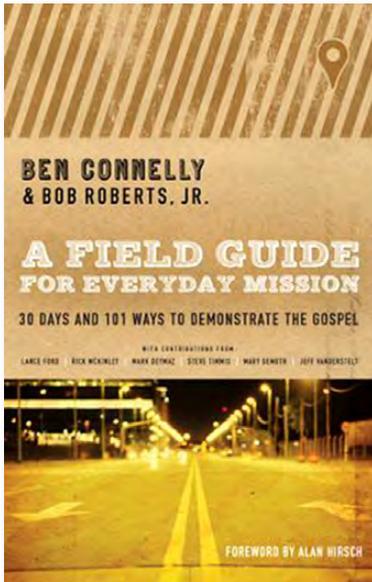
ON OUR RADAR

Practical resources for you and your church

A Look Inside:

11 unexpected ways to start sharing the gospel without killing your relationships

By Ben Connelly and Dr. Bob Roberts, Jr.



Those who follow Jesus have a God-given command and Spirit-empowered desire to share the gospel, but often we don't know where to begin. Plus, we're worried about getting it wrong and damaging relationships with friends and family. It doesn't have to be that way. Here are 11 ways to show and tell the gospel.

- 1. Walk your dog.** Walk when your neighbors are outside. Strike up conversations.
- 2. Fix broken things.** Jesus saw brokenness in the physical world as symbolic of spiritual brokenness; you can too. Pick

up trash, help a neighbor with a home improvement project, clean a park, etc.

3. Build short fences. Tall fences don't make good neighbors; they distance and privatize you. Remove fences between you and your neighbors, or if you must have them, build them low.

4. Try a new hobby. Not stoked about video games, cycling, or model cars, but know folks who are? Become excited about people, and prepare to be dominated, out of breath, or have gluey fingers.

5. Display imperfection. Instead of hiding faults and mistakes, talk about your



humanness and the fruit God produces as He continues to redeem it.

6. Pray before conversations. Whether a meeting, business call, or friendly chat, pray before it starts . . . for God to lead your words and help you model His character.

7. Tip well . . . even if they do a horrible job. Show dignity, kindness, grace, mercy, and the love of Christ. Greet by name waiters, assistants, janitorial staff, drivers, and housekeepers who surround you.

8. Ask good questions. Show people you care about them, their beliefs, and their desires. “When do you feel like that?” “Were you afraid?” “How did you respond?” “What concerns you most?” “How are you doing with it now?” “Tell me more!” and of course, “Why?”

9. Ask what people think of God. Everyone considers that question and most will answer. Even if some answers scare you, it’s a way to see how others think about deep things.

10. Talk to not-yet believers the same way you talk to Christians. Discuss hobbies, passions, work, or whatever you talk about in Christian circles—95 percent of conversations can look the same.

11. Watch your reactions. Respond to frustrations in gracious ways. Ignore office gossip. Display patience in difficulty. The “small moments” of life are platforms to display your faith.

Parting word of caution . . . beware of turning people into projects and forcing the gospel uninvited. Remember, most evangelism happens through meaningful conversations and genuine relationships. So above all, love others well. ■

From the book A Field Guide for Everyday Mission: 30 Days and 101 Ways to Demonstrate the Gospel (Moody Publishers), by Ben Connelly and Dr. Bob Roberts, Jr.



Folks we’re following

God has zero bandwidth issues. He’s not struggling to figure which issues he has time and energy to care about.

@prophiphop, spoken word and rap artist

The church should be like salt on a meal not a salt block. We should inspire thirst rather than high blood pressure.

@martyduren, manager of Social Media Strategy at LifeWay

Nothing about this year turned out the way I thought it would. But Christ is sweeter and more precious to me because of it.

@loreferguson, writer in Dallas, Texas



ON OUR RADAR

Practical resources for you and your church

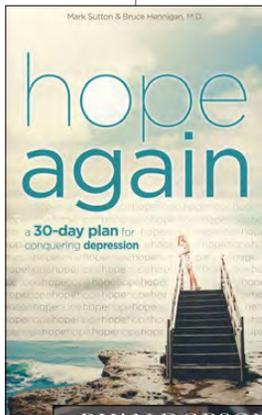
Books & Bible Studies

Hope Again: A 30-Day Plan for Conquering Depression

By Bruce Hennigan and Mark Sutton (B&H)

Depression can seem hopeless and never-ending, but there is hope for people struggling with feelings of despair. Writing out of their own experiences, Dr. Bruce Hennigan and Mark Sutton take a comprehensive, well-rounded approach to overcoming life's difficulties that's grounded in both spiritual and medical principles.

Perhaps most helpfully, the book includes "LifeFilters." Hennigan explains: "I designed a simple card with a series of thought-provoking questions on one side and a scriptural answer on the other. Thus, the LifeFilter was born: a process of filtering my thoughts and emotions through a series of questions until the lies were removed and only the truth remained."



Wanting to Believe: Faith, Family, and Finding an Exceptional Life

By Ryan Dobson (B&H)

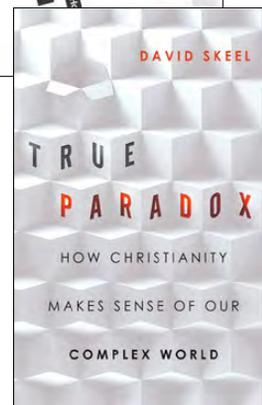
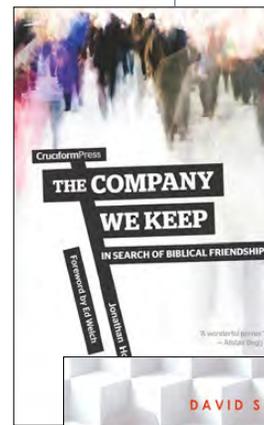
As the only son of child and family psychologist James Dobson, Ryan Dobson grew up in the spotlight of Christian celebrity culture. Like many adolescents, he pushed the limits on his parents' boundaries, determined to sort out life for himself. The journey wasn't a pretty one, but it was beneficial in the end. Because once Ryan held up his parents'

core principles to the intense gaze of scrutiny, he discovered how right they'd been. In *Wanting to Believe*, Ryan discloses the key messages imparted to him by his parents, covering topics like faith, finances, responsibility, identity, marriage, parenting, and the power of words.

The Company We Keep: In Search of Biblical Friendship

By Jonathan Holmes (Cruciform Press)

Could it be our understanding of friendship has been more informed by pop culture and social media, and less informed by the vision of friendship offered by Scripture? Is it possible friendship exists for a greater purpose than our enjoyment and comfort? Is friendship more than just having some people to hang out with on a weekend, participating in a book club, or hitting the golf course together? These questions and more are answered in this helpful book. We learn that Biblical friendship is first and foremost about a relationship with Jesus Christ. And it is out of this friendship that our human friendships find their beginning and their purpose.



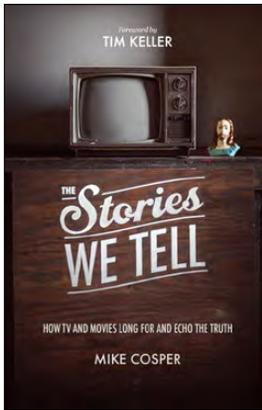
True Paradox

By David Skeel (IVP)

The complexity of the contemporary world is sometimes seen as an embarrassment for Christianity. But law professor David Skeel makes a fresh case

for the plausibility and explanatory power of Christianity. The Christian faith offers solid explanations for the central puzzles of our existence, such as our capacity for idea-making, our experience of beauty and suffering, and our inability to create a just social order.

When compared with materialism or other sets of beliefs, Christianity provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding human life as we actually live it. We need not deny the complexities of life as we experience it. But the paradoxes of our existence can lead us to the possibility that the existence of God could make sense of it all.



The Stories We Tell: How TV and Movies Long for and Echo the Truth

By Mike Cosper (Crossway)

The average American watches five hours of TV every day. Collectively, we spend roughly \$30 billion on movies each year. Simply put, we're entertainment junkies. But can we learn something from our insatiable addiction to stories? Mike Cosper thinks so.

From horror flicks to rom-coms, the tales we tell and the myths we weave inevitably echo the narrative underlying all of history: the story of humanity's tragic sin and God's triumphant salvation. This entertaining book connects the dots between the stories we tell and the one great story—helping us better understand the longings of the human heart and thoughtfully engage with the movies and TV shows that capture our imaginations.

Digital

For the Life of the World: Letters to the Exiles

Have you ever wondered, “What is my salvation actually for?” Is it only about personal atonement, getting to heaven, or something that comes later? Is it just to “have a friend in Jesus?” Is it even just about us?

For the Life of the World is an entertaining and beautifully shot film series exploring the deeper meaning of salvation. With a cast including Stephen Grabill, Amy Sherman, Anthony Bradley, Makoto Fujimura, John Perkins, and original music by Jars of Clay, *For the Life of the World: Letters to Exiles* paints a bigger, more captivating picture of Christianity's role in the world. Each episode of the seven-part series shows how God's purposes are woven into every area of our lives, including family, work, art, charity, education, government, recreation, and all of creation. It does a terrific job of showing how we are stewards in every area of life, and how our faith is relevant to each area. A great series to watch together as a church or small group.



LettersToTheExiles.com

Videos on depression

In a series of short videos, various pastors and counselors answer the most common questions people have about depression. Topics covered include:

- What's the difference between secular psychology and Christian counseling?
- How does depression manifest itself in children?
- How does depression manifest itself in teens?
- Depression and society's influence on girls.
- How does depression manifest itself in teenage boys?
- Five important questions in depression.
- Does a psychology background help in counseling?
- What's the first step in counseling a depressed person?
- What are the best three pills for depression?
- Are Christians more susceptible to depression?
- Who Gets Depression?
- What are the symptoms of depression?

HeadHeartHand.org/faq-videos-on-depression



Church Tech & Media

Offering blog posts to the church on topics such as website design, social media, mobile apps, video production, streaming, podcasting, and more, Church Tech & Media is focused on helping churches make disciples through technology, media, and communication.

**LifeWay.com/churchtech
(@LWChurchTech)**



ON OUR RADAR

Practical resources for you and your church

Conferences & Events



Ignite Conference

March 24-26, 2015, Cornerstone, Chandler, Arizona

Speakers: Ed Stetzer, Jud Wilbite, John Fuller

Ignite is a ministry-transforming event where church staff and leaders gather to increase leadership and best practices while being encouraged to influence the world through church planting and multiplication.

Convergeignite.com

The Outcomes Conference

April 14-16, 2015, Dallas, Texas

Speakers: Christine Caine, Jonathan Evans, Israel Gaither, David Kinnaman, Ken Starr, Joni Eareckson Tada, Walt Wilson

Christian Leadership Alliance equips and unites leaders to transform the world for Christ. At the 2015 Outcomes Conference, CLA will focus on “time,” believing that God has called you into leadership for such a time as this. The goal of the Outcomes Conference is to help attendees successfully pursue the kingdom outcomes God has for all leaders in these unique times!

ChristianLeadershipAlliance.org

Q Conference

April 23-25, 2015

Boston, Massachusetts

Join 1,500 other leaders to grow, collaborate, and take action in advancing the common good. Fifty challenging experts, 30 inspired Q Talks, and intentional learning community experiences will provide the environment to reconsider one’s role, individually and corporately, in shaping culture. Q is a one-of-a-kind experience that challenges and pushes attendees toward greater debate and better solutions.

QIdeas.org

Collegiate Summit

April 29-May 1, 2015

Nashville, Tennessee

Speakers: Kyle Idleman, Michael Kelley, John Dickerson, Ricky Chelette, Steve Shadrach, Nik and Ruth Ripkin, Bill Seaver, Frank Page, Rick Howerton

Held every three years, the Collegiate Summit is designed specifically for collegiate ministry leaders to help them better minister to the unique needs of college students. The event includes plenary sessions and a variety of breakouts led by experts in an array of fields, and multiple idea labs and affinity groups where practitioners direct focused conversations around specific ministry topics.

LifeWay.com/CollegiateSummit



Isn't it time we talked about mental health?

With the recent onslaught of high-profile tragedies connected with mental illness, many people, Christians and non-Christians alike, are talking about the challenges of mental illness. It's an important conversation. But one thing I've observed is the difficulty with which Christians address mental health in a responsible and holistic way. Mental illness carries with it an unfortunate and undesired stigma to which many church leaders don't know how to respond to those struggling with mental illness. I'm encouraged, however, by the openness among church leaders toward understanding mental illness so they can serve their people more appropriately.

The information gleaned from the recent LifeWay Research study on mental health and the church is very telling. It reveals some of the holes in our collective understanding of mental illness and our approach to helping those caught in its unforgiving clutches.

One out of four people experience some type of mental illness in a given year, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. That means people sitting in our pews struggle with mental illness. They and their families desperately want the church to talk openly about the issue so it won't be taboo.

However, our research indicates

most pastors rarely talk about mental illness in sermons or other large group messages. In many ways, the church, the supposed haven for sufferers, is not a safe place for mental illness. For the stigma of mental illness to be broken, there must be direct, transparent speech from Christian leaders. We need more open dialogue in the church.

That said, 56 percent of pastors strongly agree local churches have a responsibility to provide resources and support to individuals with mental illness and their families. That number is not nearly as high as it needs to be, but it is an encouraging start. Also encouraging is that 53 percent of individuals with mental illness surveyed said the local church has been supportive.

Churches tend to either abdicate their role in mental health to outside medical professionals or to isolate themselves from the medical community. Neither response is helpful. Even those in secular branches of psychology and psychiatry say psychological health is better when people are connected with a faith community, and that should drive churches to healthy partnership with trained medical professionals.

The Bible teaches that Christ's followers are meant to serve the broken and the hurting. When Jesus announced His ministry in Luke 4, He said He had been sent to preach good

news to the poor, captive, and blind. Throughout His ministry, Jesus served the hurting. The world is continuously surprised, however, that the followers of Jesus are less inclined to do the same. So, the church shouldn't abdicate to nor isolate from those trained in these fields but, instead, find the place of tension in the middle from which the gospel flows forth unimpeded to the hurting.

There is incredible need for churches to speak more about mental health and to do so honestly, directly, and purposefully. Attitudes are certainly shifting on this front. Churches are moving toward a greater level of awareness and engagement on issues of mental health.

My challenge to the church is that we might move beyond the whispering, the silence, the shame, and the stigma. Instead, let's understand and show others that Jesus came seeking, saving, and serving the lost and broken people around Him. We, His church, honor Him when we join in His mission by doing the same.

Hopefully, we can learn from the ongoing conversation and shape a new, more helpful approach to serving those who struggle with mental illness. ■

ED STETZER (@EdStetzer) is executive director of LifeWay Research. For more visit EdStetzer.com.

Winter: DEC/JAN/FEB 2015

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“Pastor, what is my next step?”

Now you can have a better answer.

The question comes in many forms: What does God want from me? What is God’s will for my life? How do I get closer to God? Essentially, they all point to the desire to be a better disciple.

These are not easy questions to answer. But we can help. Just have your congregation take the Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA). This simple questionnaire (based on 8 attributes of discipleship that consistently show up in the life of a maturing believer) reveals the specific strengths and weaknesses of your congregation. Individual reports help each person focus on specific areas that need improvement. The group report will help you plan sermons that address the needs that many share in your church.



Transformational
Discipleship Assessment

Learn more at www.LifeWay.com/TDA

